

Great and Glorious Grace!

New Creation Teaching Ministry
Wednesday Night Bible Study

Term 1, 1999 - Grace Comes Into The World

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An outline of the studies.

1. What Is Grace?
2. The Planning of Grace Before All Time: Grace and the Trinity
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5. The Appearing of the Grace of God: The Incarnation and Ministry of Christ
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1. What Is Grace?

The question invites deceptively to think of grace as a *substance*. In one sense it is true to say that there is no such *thing* as grace. Grace is always the *grace of God; of our Lord Jesus Christ, from God our Father*, (See Acts 11:23; 13:43; 14:26; 20:24; Rom. 5:15; 2Cor 8:1; Gal. 6:18; 1Thess. 5:28; 2Thess 3:18; Heb 12:15; 1Pet. 5:12, etc., etc!) *Grace is never separated from God - it is God acting towards humanity and creation in particular way. It is not simply the result of that action.*

Another way of saying this is that grace is always known relationally - through relationship with God, and seen in relationships at a human level. So - Acts 11:23.

When Man was created he had no need of grace. God is and has always been the God of all grace (1Pet. 5:10). Before the world began, He destined us in love to be His sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will, to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.” (Ephesians. 1:5-6) And there was a Lamb slain before the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8). What we must see though is that the sovereign planning of God to act in grace in the flow of history did not make Man dependent upon grace for life when created. It is true that nothing that Man had did he have except as a gift (1Cor 4:7; James 1:17-18). But *gift* is not the same as *grace*.

The idea of grace is specifically used in the Scriptures for God's decisive actions of favour and kindness conning into situations where such action is not deserved or merited, and in fact where the opposite actions of judgment and condemnation are merited and expected.

In the Old Testament, two Hebrew words are used which comp close to the New Testament word “grace” _ they were *chen* and *chesed* It is these words which are translated in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint or LXX) with the word *charis*; which is the word used in the New Testament for “grace,” *chen* has a strong sense of something undeserved - so for example in Exodus 33:13 when Moses intercedes for the Lord's presence towards the people of Israel after the affair of the golden calf. In human affairs, *chen* is used when the weaker appeals to the stronger for help; favour or mercy. *Chesed* is a covenant word, and may be translated as “mercy” but is better as “loving kindness” or “steadfast love” it has the idea of covenant faithfulness; regardless of the response of the covenant partner, Jer, 31:3 and Isa. 54:8 link clearly the ideas of covenant love and grace.

GRACE COMES INTO THE WORLD

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In the New Testament the word *charis* came from a background of meaning “gracefulness”, “beauty”, “a favour”; and “gratitude.” It had hints of payback in its meaning. When the New Testament writers took this word and used it in describing the action of God in Jesus Christ they gave it a meaning that it had not formerly possessed. They didn't invent this meaning but the once for, unique and unrepeatable act of God in Christ imbued it with new meaning.

“Grace in the Christian community meant that God was always going out to sinful, needy, and undeserving man to do him good, and that good was something man could not do for himself Grace is the Father's action in the Son by the power of the Holy Spirit to effect restoration in man and sustain in the battle to live in faith in the face of evil's unremitting attacks upon him.” (Geoff Bingham, *Great and Glorious Grace*, pp. 18-19)

2. The God Of All Grace

1Pet. 5:10: 'After you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, establish, and strengthen you.'

'...the God of all grace...'

To speak of God as the God of grace is not simply to list grace as one of the things that God 'does' - grace is part and parcel of the being of God; it is the outflow of His character towards us.

Exodus 33:17-34:9

Background: Moses had been talking with the Lord about the Lord's purposes with His people, following the disaster of the golden calf false worship.

The Lord had threatened to cast off the people and to take Moses on by himself, and to build a new people from him (Exod. 32:9-10).

Then He had promised to send an angel to guide the people through the wilderness to the Promised Land, but to not go with them Himself, lest He destroy them in His holiness.

Moses then pushed through to a greater knowledge of the Lord and prayed for the presence of the Lord to be with the people, on the basis of His favour to Moses. (Cf. Jesus - '...not ashamed to call them His brethren...')

'The LORD said to Moses, 'This very thing that you have spoken I will do; for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name (Exodus 33:17).'

Moses sought the Lord's confirmation of this promise by asking to see His glory (v. 18).

The Lord promised to show His goodness and to proclaim His name to Moses - this was to be the revelation of His glory (v. 19). The Name is the summary or exposition of the goodness; these two are the outshining of the glory of God. The Name of the Lord is the revelation of His own essential being. Note the content of the Name of the Lord - 'I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy to whom I will show mercy.'

Yet even this revelation was to be hidden (vv. 20-23); Moses could not bear to see the whole glory - it would kill him. So Moses saw the passing glory from a distance, rather than face to face.

At the actual event, the Lord descended and stood with Moses there on Sinai and proclaimed His name to him (34:5). This was all God's initiative and action. Moses did not have to discover the grace of God; Moses did not have to find an image of God, or find a name for God that helped him. The Lord came to Moses and revealed himself. To know God as the God of all grace is always by revelation, and never any other way. Nor would we arrive at the thought of God's graciousness ourselves -

Isa. 55:-6-9: 'Seek the LORD while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.'

The proclamation of the name (34:6-7): 'the Lord, the Lord' - repetition indicates the absolute trustworthiness of this revelation.

The proclamation of the name has two quite distinct parts in Hebrew that are not so obvious to us in English translation. Vv. 6b-7a is adjectival, whilst 7b uses verbs. The adjectival section (...a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin...). accords with the fact that this is God's inner most nature, rather than a catalogue of His acts. The transition to verbs (but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation) seems to place this in a secondary place in the revelation. this ties in with the absence of any declaration of wrath in the promise of this theophany in Exod. 33:19. Overall the revelation is of the holy God whose heart is gracious and who maintains his integrity in the face of human sin. Grace and mercy and wrath and judgment are linked as expressions of the Holy One, but there is priority to the grace of God. In fact judgment is given the task of establishing grace at the Cross.

Isa. 54:8 'In overflowing wrath for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you, says the LORD, your Redeemer.'

Isa. 60:10 'Foreigners shall build up your walls, and their kings shall minister to you; for in my wrath I smote you, but in my favor I have had mercy on you.'

Hab 3:2 'O LORD, I have heard the report of you, and your work, O LORD, do I fear. In the midst of the years renew it; in the midst of the years make it known; in wrath remember mercy.'

Jam. 2:13 'For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy; yet mercy triumphs over judgment.'

Grace and the Trinity

God is the God whose very character and being is that of grace. We know God to be Father and Son and Spirit; grace is the outflow of these Three in One to a needy world. That grace has always been in their character and being, but the expression of it is occasioned by the need of humanity. The creation came to be with grace's expression and work already purposed.

2Tim 1:9 '... (God) who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not in virtue of our works but in virtue of his own purpose and the grace which he gave us in Christ Jesus ages ago...'

Isaiah 63:16 'For you are our Father, though Abraham does not know us and Israel does not acknowledge us; thou, O LORD, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is your name.'

That is why at the Fall, there is no hiatus between the sin and God's drawing up of a plan to deal with it - the promise comes straight away! (Gen 3:15!) Revelation speaks of the Lamb who was slain before the foundation of the world.

Consistently in the Scriptures grace is seen as the initiative, work and prerogative of the Father - 'grace be with you from God and Father... and the Lord Jesus Christ' there are a number of occasions where it is simply 'the grace of Christ' - but the key thought is in the initiative of the grace in the Father. grace is not the convincing by sacrifice of the Father by

the Son to be kind - it is the action and giving by the Father of His only beloved Son for the world. Note that once in the Scriptures the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of grace (Heb. 10:29), but that in Rev. 1:4,5 grace is seen as issuing from the Father, the Spirit and the Son. On this matter of the source of grace, John 1:14 and 2John 1:3 are very helpful: we see that Christ comes full of grace and truth from the Father, and that it is the grace that he bears from being the image and glory of the Father as the Father's one and only Son that we receive. The Father is the initiator of grace - he sends the Son, he loves the world so much; the Son is the grace or is the revelation of the grace - when he appeared, grace appeared; the Holy Spirit is the revelator of this grace and the immediator of it; as He comes to us we are made participants in Christ and in the riches of His grace. Without Him we could not know grace.

The relationships within the Trinity are not contractual; it is not proper to speak of the Father and the Son coming to some agreement. The Son is called the Son-Word because he so much hears the word of His Father and obeys it that this is His very being. Covenant is the outflow of the triune Three to the world, binding humanity and creatures to themselves, and setting a goal of our final participation and inclusion within the Trinitarian relationships (see, e.g. 2Pet. 1:4). God's grace is the action of the Holy three to ensure that this goal is reached.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. There is a world of difference between being 'a lover of love' and 'an object of grace.' Discuss this statement. Share how you came to know the grace of God as a liberating revelation, if this is what you have come to know.
2. Moses had to discover the grace of God when God was hiding Himself under the opposite - it seemed He was intent on casting of the people of Israel. Through this Moses found out something of the depth of God's love that he had not known before. Discuss why the Lord does this - reveals Himself through His hiddenness - and share of times when you have come to know the Lord's deep love in this way.
3. How does knowing that the Father is the initiator of grace affect you?
4. Without the Holy Spirit we could not know nor bear the revelation of grace in Jesus Christ. What has happened to us that did not happen to Moses that has enabled us to receive the fullness of grace and truth (John 1:14)? What is the role of the Holy Spirit in this event?
5. Spend time sharing particular prayer points with each other, and praying for them!

3. The Grace of God in the Old Testament (1)

In the first study the point was made that apart from the fulfillment of all that is promised in the Old Testament in the event of Jesus Christ, there was no grace in the Old Testament. It is only because of what the Father has done through Christ that we see the operation of grace in the Old Testament.

Romans 3:25-26: 'God put (Christ Jesus) forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins; it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies him who has faith in Jesus.'

Up until the coming of Jesus Christ, God '...had passed over former sins...' - this is what Israel knew. Because of the planned coming of Christ this passing over of sins was the action of God in grace. But the passing over of sins without the coming of Christ is not grace: forbearance or patience is not grace.

The whole Old Testament then speaks to us of the grace of God as it prepares us for the coming of Jesus Christ, the appearing of grace amongst us, that grace which was planned before the ages. The story of the Scriptures has been called 'salvation history' - or we could call it 'grace history.' It involves an unfolding of the plan of God to act in grace. Promise is added to promise to build up the picture of God's saving action. This revelation builds up through the pages of the Old Testament - but there is never a point in the whole flow where a person can claim that they did not know enough! Where God promises to act, the proper response is faith, and from Abel onwards there have been men and women of faith, just as there have been those who oppose God and insist on their autonomy, just as Cain did.

Genesis 3:15: '(To the serpent the Lord said,) 'I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.''

This has been called the proto-Gospel, the very first declaration of the intention of God in His grace to deal with sin, death and the devil to the benefit of humanity. It is hard to know what Adam and Eve thought or understood of this prophecy - but it was not simply for them, but for us on whom the end of the ages have come. Whatever they understood it as pointing to, what is clear is that it indicated an act of God through humanity to destroy the Destroyer. However they understood it, the two (and, in them, all humanity) were called to faith in the action of God.

Genesis 4:1-7: 'Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, 'I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD.' And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a tiller of the ground. In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. The LORD said to Cain, 'Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is couching at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it.''

We know from Hebrews 11:4 that the decisive difference between Abel and Cain was that Abel was a man of faith, whilst Cain was not. 'By faith, Abel offered up a better sacrifice than

Cain...' - and by 'by faith' what is meant is 'by trusting in God, and refusing to trust in human power, ability or merit; by believing that God is the God of all grace who will by no means clear the guilty but who forgives iniquity and sin and transgression.'

It is interesting that both men saw it fit to offer sacrifice to the Lord. They were both aware of the reality of God and of His provision. Yet Cain was opposed to him and Abel was a man of faith. Did his faith earn grace? - No! his faith issued from the revelation God had given him of Himself as the God of all grace. Perhaps Abel had feasted in his soul on that wonderful promise concerning the coming Seed, and knew that every day was a day of God's passing over of sin until the Seed should come!

Cain was angry at the acceptance of Abel's sacrifice, and the rejection of his. The Lord said to him, 'If you do right will you not be accepted.' Gordon Wenham has argued convincingly that the best way to translate this is, 'If you do right will you not be forgiven?' This indicates to us even more strongly that Abel's faith was in the God of grace - and that it was precisely the issue of grace, of God's forgiveness and salvation to sinners, that was central in his faith. Romans 4:5 says, 'To the one who does not work, but trusts God who justifies the wicked (ungodly), his faith is credited as righteousness.' The Lord's rebuke to Cain was an invitation into the knowledge of that grace that Abel knew.

Obviously we will not be able to cover the whole Old Testament in this great detail! Enough to say, from Abel onwards there are two distinct lines - the people of faith and the people of pride. Those who are of faith are so because the God of glory, the God of all grace has appeared to them. Grace always precedes faith - we aren't forgiven because we believe; we believe because we see the trustworthiness of the Lord in His grace.

A good example of this is Noah. We know of him (Gen. 6:9) that he was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God. It may seem that this is the basis of God's choosing of him and his family. Yet Gen. 6:8 tells us that God's grace preceded these things - 'Noah found favour (chen) in the eyes of the Lord. His righteousness flowed out of the grace of God. His faith was created and sustained by the grace of God.'

4. The Grace of God in the Old Testament (2)

In our study last week we looked at Romans 3:25-26. Up until the coming of Jesus Christ, God ‘...had passed over former sins...’ - this is what Israel knew. Because of the planned coming of Christ this passing over of sins was the action of God in grace. But the passing over of sins without the coming of Christ is not grace: forbearance or patience is not grace. The whole Old Testament then speaks to us of the grace of God as it prepares us for the coming of Jesus Christ, the appearing of grace amongst us, that grace which was planned before the ages. This grace history and the goal of grace is made known to us particularly in the covenants that God made with His people.

Read Psalm 106 for a succinct and realistic history of Israel! It is in the flow of this history that the covenant actions are given to the nation. Covenant comes as a proclamation of the Lord of His determination to be do good and be gracious to a sinful race and world.

Covenant = an unalterable, permanently bonded relationship between God and man; a gracious undertaking entered into by God for the benefit and blessing of man, and specifically to those who by faith receive the covenantal promises and live in covenant obedience.

Genesis 9:8--17

This covenant establishment followed the judgment of the Flood. It is:

(i) undertaken unilaterally by God Himself, without any motivating action from Noah or his family (9:9a);

(ii) it is a covenant not only with Noah and his family but with all his descendants, and with all the creation (9:9b-10);

(iii) it is a covenant promise that never again will there be the devastating flood (9:11); in effect it is God’s promise to pass over sins until the great judgment

(iv) it is given with a sign - the rainbow (9:12-13). The rainbow is a sign of a weapon of war - and God’s bow is His weapon of judgment: see Psalms 7:12-13 and 38:1-4. When God set his bow in the clouds, He was putting down His weapon of judgment. Note that when he put it down, it is left not facing the earth in threat but facing the Lord. There is the risk that should the judgment come again, it is going to pierce the Lord rather than us.

(v) God’s promise is to relate to mankind on the basis of the covenant promise made this day, not on the basis of human desert (9:14-16)

Genesis 15:1-21

This covenant sealing took place some time after the promise of the Lord came to Abram to bless him and make him great, in order to bring blessing to the nations (12:1-3). That blessing is now focussed further in the provision of a son and in the provision of land to dwell in. Again we see that this covenant is:

(i) made unilaterally by the Lord, He taking the initiative to speak to Abram and bring the promise.

(ii) it is a covenant promise that Abram will have a son of his own, and that a great nation will grow from him, and that a particular land area will be given to him.

(iii) The gathering of the animals and their slaughter was not uncommon in treaty making deals between human parties. The cutting up of the animals and the walk between them was an active way of saying 'Should I break this agreement, let be done to me what has been done to the animals.' What is unusual is that Abram is sent by the Lord into a deep sleep when this sealing of the covenant takes place. He does not walk through the slain pieces. Instead, he watches a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch pass through. 'No one has seen God at any time; the only Son who is in the bosom of the Father, he ash made him known.' The ritual indicated that the Lord himself would bear the penalty of covenant unfaithfulness.

(iv) a sign of the covenant was given in Gen. 17:9-14 - circumcision for the men in the community (either Israelite or bond slave).

Exodus 24:3-8

This ritual seals the covenant of Moses which incorporated the Law given to Moses on the mountain. The agreement to keep the law was not the basis of the covenant - Exodus 20:1 makes clear that the obedience Israel promised flowed out of the relationship promised by the Lord in His gracious dealing with them. The sealing of the covenant here involved a ritual of blood, taken from animals sacrificed to the Lord. The shedding of blood is to be seen as substitutionary, and it was from the reconciliation that such blood shedding bought that the obedience was to flow.

5. The Appearing of Grace— The Incarnation and Ministry of Jesus Christ

We have seen that through the Old Testament God prepared His world for the appearing of His grace. When this moment would come, none of the prophets knew (1Pet. 1:10-12 - ‘The prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired about this salvation; they inquired what person or time was indicated by the Spirit of Christ within them when predicting the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glory. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things which have now been announced to you by those who preached the good news to you through the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.’) but their prophesying was to serve us to whom the appearing of grace has been announced. And at the right time, when the time had fully come, God sent forth His Son!

Each of those to whom the coming birth of Christ was foretold were filled with joy at the grace of the event. Firstly there was Zechariah who was told of the coming of the prophet of the Messiah. Gabriel said to him concerning John, ‘He will turn many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared (Luke 1:16-17).’ John would have the role of preparing people for the coming of the Lord their God, preparing them by turning their hearts to the Lord. Zechariah’s response was initially unbelief - for which he received the Lord’s discipline of not being able to speak - but at the birth of his son the discipline was past and Zechariah was liberated into a paean of praise to the God of grace:

‘Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, that we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all who hate us; to perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant, the oath which he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life. And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God, when the day shall dawn upon us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.’ (Luke 1:67-79)

Mary received the news of the coming birth of her son as a message of grace (Luke 1:28-35): ‘Hail, O favoured (= graced) one...’ ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God...’ The choosing of Mary to be the mother was entirely a matter of grace. The following promise to her concerning her son was to the effect that he was the fulfilment of the Davidic covenant.

When Mary visited Elizabeth (Luke 1:39-56) Elizabeth knew something of the grace of God in the visit, as the child within her (John the Baptist to be!) leapt for joy at being with the Christ and she was filled with Holy Spirit. Her acknowledgment of grace was also a cry of joy (v. 44). Mary there also gave voice to her joyful thankfulness for the grace of God coming to her in the Magnificat - note the phrases ‘...he has regarded the low estate of his

handmaiden...’, ‘...all generations will call me blessed...’, ‘...he has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy...’

Joseph too heard the message of grace in the coming birth of the son to Mary in Matthew 1:18-25, when he was called to name him Jesus, ‘...for he will save his people from their sins.’

After his birth those who greeted him and announced him saw in him the grace of God in action. See the angelic proclamation of good news of the birth of a Saviour - good news of a great joy (Luke 2:10-11), and the declaration of glory to God and peace among men with whom He is pleased (‘well disposed’ = whom He graces!) by the heavenly armies (Luke 2:14). Simeon and Anna knew the grace of God anticipated in the Scriptures had come amongst them in the child:

‘Lord, now let your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.’ (Luke 2:29-32).

‘And coming up at that very hour she gave thanks to God, and spoke of him to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.’ (Luke 2:38).

(None of this was known by sight, but only by faith. Without rebirth by the Holy Spirit such an understanding could never come to a person. A person has to come into grace to be able to see grace.)

Every movement and action of the Son from His birth onwards was the action of grace. This was so in a dual way. Firstly, his earthly ministry was the living demonstration of the reality and dynamic of grace. Situations that up until Christ came to them were hopeless and had no possibility of relief were transformed by him - people born blind, lame for years, demonised and so on. Note the number of times in the Gospels that people come to Jesus who had tried every other avenue. In Jesus Christ a new creation, a new future, a new hope was breaking into the world! ‘Grace upon grace’ is the only way to describe his ministry! God was in Christ going out to do sinful man good, so that many were healed and many relieved of torturing spirits, and many came to know the forgiveness of their sins in an authentic way. Joy erupted into the world where Jesus walked.

But secondly, grace consists not just in the dealing with the failure of the old humanity, but also in providing a new humanity for us to walk in. In becoming Man for ever, Christ has created a new humanity for us to participate in. All his earthly life is about the establishment of that new, true humanity. His obedience is for us in a dual way:

- (i) it qualifies him to be the spotless lamb who deals with sin;
- (ii) it provides us with an obedience to walk in.

6. Grace Grows On A Tree—The Atonement

The ministry of Jesus only made sense in the light of the Cross. Apart from his coming to that goal of redemptive suffering, his life and ministry would have been of little value to anyone. The signs would have pointed no where, and the healings that he had performed would have been undone by subsequent death or illness or slavery. Until the devil, death, sin and judgment had been dealt with finally, the small victories of his public ministry had no permanence. Throughout his ministry Jesus was quite clear about the necessity, the indispensability of the cross in the work he came to achieve. Mark 8:31, 9:31 and 10:32 record this recurring refrain in his instruction to the disciples. ‘The son of Man must suffer many things...’ Certainly Jesus prepared them for the coming death and resurrection, and showed them its indispensability.

Jesus gave various indications as to the meaning of his death and resurrection in his teaching. In John 3:14-15 (‘As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.’) he compared his being lifted up (= exalted or crucified) with the lifting up of the bronze serpent by Moses in Numbers 21. The bronze serpent was a representation of the plague that was afflicting Israel as the Lord’s judgment on their sin. By looking to the serpent, an Israelite under the judgment could find relief. The bronze serpent took their place as it were. Jesus is saying that he was going to go to the place of judgment for the world; all who look to him will find release from the judgment of God.

In John 12:27-33, Jesus prayed: ‘Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify thy name.’ Then a voice came from heaven, ‘I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.’ The crowd standing by heard it and said that it had thundered. Others said, ‘An angel has spoken to him.’ Jesus answered, ‘This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out; and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.’ He said this to show by what death he was to die.’

At the last supper, Jesus had pointed to bread and wine as signs of his coming death for the world - ‘This is my body, given for you... This is my blood of the new covenant, poured out for the forgiveness of sins...’

We must see that without the shedding of his blood, there was no forgiveness of sins. There is no way God can forgive simply by forgiving. ‘You who are of purer eyes than to behold evil and can not look on wrong, why do you look on faithless men, and are silent when the wicked swallows up the man more righteous than he? (Habakkuk 1:13).’ Habakkuk’s complaint is not that God is squeamish about evil - he knows that the Lord cannot look on evil without being against the evildoer. The heinous nature of our guilt, the terrible pollution of ourselves through evil acts, the doom of death that rightly hangs over all humanity cannot rightly be known, in its fulness, but it must not be minimised in a simplistic forgiveness. Neither may we play off God’s holiness against his grace in this way. The forgiveness of God is the forgiveness of the Holy One. As we saw in Romans 3:21-26 in a previous study, there had been a period for the passing over of sins (which is, by the way, all that a cross-less forgiveness can lead us to), which has now ended by the putting forth of Christ as an atoning

sacrifice to take away sins, in such way that the righteousness of God is declared and known to all.

A number of places help us dive into the depths of that depthless action of the Cross.

‘For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.’ (1 Corinthians 15:3-5).

‘...Jesus our Lord, who was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification. (Romans 4:24-25)

‘But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.’ (Romans 5:8).

‘For Christ also died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God...’ (1 Peter 3:18)

‘As it is, [Christ] has appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.’ (Hebrews 9:26).

These simplest of statements of the work of the Cross indicates that Christ’s death was for our sins - i.e. it was substitutionary, him bearing the penalty of our sins

‘ God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.’ (Romans 8:3-4)

‘For our sake He made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.’ (2 Corinthians 5:21)

‘He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.’ (1 Peter 2:24)

Here we see somewhat deeper into the matter - that Christ bore the penalty by bearing the sins. Sin received all that it was due on the Cross; it wasn’t simply man being punished in our place. He bore our sins in his body. God made Christ to be sin: not that Christ had sin of his own, but on that cross so closely did he identify with sinners that he was ‘made sin.’

Perhaps Paul puts it most penetratingly in Galatians 2:20: ‘I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.’ In bearing our sins, Christ bore us; we were present in him, receiving in him all that was due to us for our sins. To do this apart from him would be destruction to us. He having no sin of his own was able to bear the judgment.

We are called to look to him, to gaze into this depthless act and to know the grace of God to us in it.

7. The Resurrection Of Jesus Christ And The Grace Of God

Three times in Mark's Gospel (8:31, 9:31, 10:32) we hear Jesus predict the necessity of his coming death and resurrection. Each time he predicted his death, he spoke also of the resurrection on the third day. The death on the cross and the resurrection were of one piece. Two errors can be made: (1) the resurrection as the reversal of the cross, such that the atonement is lost; (2) the death of Christ for our sins spoken of, with no real indication of the significance of Christ's resurrection in the working of God in grace. In Romans 4:24-25, Paul says: '...Jesus our Lord, who was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification.'

Romans 5:1-2: 'Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God.'

The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is essential in our obtaining access to the grace of God. Had Jesus not been raised, we would not have access to grace, because it is only in and through him that we have this access. There are a number of aspects to this which we shall now examine.

(1) All the work of the atonement accomplished by Christ on the Cross was attested to and validated by the Father when He raised His Son from death. Had Christ remained dead, then sin, death and the devil would have been seen to be more powerful than he who sought to deliver us from these enemies. Death has its power from sin (1Cor. 15:56a); where sin is dealt with - and this must be through the exhausting of the claim of the law on sinners (1Cor. 15:56b) - then death has no longer any claim. Christ bore our sins in his body on the tree; there in his body was the 'final showdown'. Had he failed to rise, then we would have to say that we were in no better state than before his death. 'If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most to be pitied.' (1 Cor. 15:17-19)

(2) When Christ rose from the dead, our verdict on him was reversed by God the Father. Isaiah puts it this way:

'Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.
But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed.
All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way;
and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.
He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
and like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth.
By oppression and judgment he was taken away;
and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living,
stricken for the transgression of my people?
And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death,
although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.
Yet it was the will of the LORD to bruise him; he has put him to grief;

when he makes himself an offering for sin,
he shall see his offspring, he shall prolong his days;
the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand;
he shall see the fruit of the travail of his soul and be satisfied;
by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant,
make many to be accounted righteous;
and he shall bear their iniquities.' (Isaiah 53:4-11)

This is one of the things that struck the crowd at Pentecost with fear as Peter preached to them: 'Peter said, 'Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.' Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brethren, what shall we do?'' (Acts 2:36-37). At the beginning for the letter to the Romans, Paul says, '...the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord...' (Romans 1:3-4) The resurrection is the public declaration by the Father of the acceptability of all that the Son has done in obedience to Him. Much as the appearance of the high priest on the Day of Atonement declared the acceptability and effectiveness of the sacrifice, so Christ's appearance declares the satisfaction of God in the atonement. It qualified the Son to rule over all things (so also Rev. 5:1-7.)

(3) Apart from the resurrection, there is no spread of grace in the world. As risen Lord, Jesus is bringing the world to face the grace of God through the message of the Gospel. 'God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you in turning every one of you from your wickedness.' (Acts 3:26) Paul preached at Antioch: 'Brethren, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you that fear God, to us has been sent the message of this salvation. For those who live in Jerusalem and their rulers, because they did not recognize him nor understand the utterances of the prophets which are read every sabbath, fulfilled these by condemning him. Though they could charge him with nothing deserving death, yet they asked Pilate to have him killed. And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a tomb. But God raised him from the dead; 31 and for many days he appeared to those who came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now his witnesses to the people. And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus; as also it is written in the second psalm, 'Thou art my Son, today I have begotten thee.' And as for the fact that he raised him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, he spoke in this way, 'I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.' Therefore he says also in another psalm, 'Thou wilt not let thy Holy One see corruption.' For David, after he had served the counsel of God in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid with his fathers, and saw corruption; but he whom God raised up saw no corruption. Let it be known to you therefore, brethren, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him every one that believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses. Beware, therefore, lest there come upon you what is said in the prophets: 'Behold, you scoffers, and wonder, and perish; for I do a deed in your days, a deed you will never believe, if one declares it to you.' (Acts 13:26-41).

(4) Christ lives for us. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the basis of all Christian living. we live in him. 'The life I live I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.' In Ephesians 2:1-10, Paul says, 'You he made alive, when you were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following

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the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience. Among these we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of body and mind, and so we were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

‘But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God - not because of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.’ The grace of God includes our being made alive together with Christ, and has the goal of us walking in the good works prepared for us.

In Romans 6:1-11 Paul says the same thing: ‘What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

‘For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the sinful body might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For he who has died is freed from sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him. For we know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.’

8. Sovereign, Reigning Grace

‘20 But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. 23 But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. 24 Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. 25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death. 27 ‘For God has put all things in subjection under his feet.’ But when it says, ‘All things are put in subjection under him,’ it is plain that he is excepted who put all things under him. 28 When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things under him, that God may be everything to every one.’ (1 Corinthians 15:20-28)

‘He must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet...’

This phrase describes the reality of life that we live in now. The time between Christ’s resurrection/ascension and his return at the end of history is the time when the enemies of the Kingdom of God are being put under Christ’s feet. We can say that this time is the time of sovereign, reigning grace. By this we mean that, in this period of Christ’s session (his rule at the right hand of the throne), the purpose of the Father effected in His Son is being taken out to the ends of the earth effectively and powerfully. As the Gospel goes out to the ends of the earth, the God of grace brings all things in subjection to His grace. At the end of this period, every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. For some this will be to eternal bliss; to others, it will eternal sorrow - but all will acknowledge Jesus Christ the Lord.

At his ascension, Jesus said these words to his disciples:

‘18 And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.’ (Matthew 28:18-20)

‘45 Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, 46 and said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, 47 and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things. 49 And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high.’ 50 Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. 51 While he blessed them, he parted from them, and was carried up into heaven. 52 And they returned to Jerusalem with great joy, 53 and were continually in the temple blessing God.’ (Luke 24:36-53)

‘7 He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority. 8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.’ 9 And when he had said this, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. 10 And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, 11 and said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.’ (Acts 1:7-11)

These passages give us the key as to the manner in which sovereign, reigning grace brings the enemies of the Lord under his feet. It is through the Spirit-filled proclamation of Jesus Christ through the disciples. Grace extends to the ends of the earth over all the enemies of the Lord by the message of grace brought by the witnesses of the grace of God.

The book of Acts then shows us the start of the outworking of this reign of grace. What is key to see is that Jesus is with his people always, to the close of the age. So, it is never the people of God who have to establish the reign of Christ. Christ himself does this and we are witnesses of these things. We participate in Christ's own subduing of the nations. We participate in Christ's own bringing of his enemies under his feet. We do not subdue them for him; we subdue them in him.

John places the commissioning of the disciples in the upper room:

'19 On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you.' 20 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. 21 Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you.' 22 And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.' (John 20:19-23)

Here, amongst other things we see that Jesus sends us in the same way as the Father sent him. The ministry of the people of God (the church) is the same as that of Jesus, who is with his people, still fulfilling the commission the Father gave him. And what is true is that the triumph of sovereign reigning grace will come about in the same way as it was effected in Christ: that is through being crucified in weakness. The book of Acts makes clear that the triumph of grace was always in the midst of the suffering of the people of God.

Acts 3-4 is a helpful example of this. In 3:1-10 we are told of the remarkable healing of the crippled beggar at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple. This healing took place in the name of Jesus (v. 6). In 3:11-26 Peter preached to the crowd that gathered to see this amazing event. Peter was very clear that it is not from any power or holiness in themselves that the healing has come - rather it is in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and through faith in that name. This healing was a sign of sovereign, reigning grace. The hearers - who had been responsible for Jesus' death - were called to know grace. 'Repent then and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you, even Jesus.' In this way, enemies were subdued! Those who refused to listen were warned that judgment would come (v. 23.)

In 4:1-7, we see that this proclamation immediately brought suffering and opposition. Regardless, a large number were converted. In 4:8-11, despite the pressure to dissociate from Christ, Peter, filled with Spirit, continued to proclaim. The necessity of bowing to sovereign reigning grace is affirmed: 'There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.' (Acts 4:12) In Acts 4:13-22 the rulers of the people were perplexed by this courage, and having only threats (for fear of the people) tried to intimidate them out of further proclamation. Peter and John replied, before they were released, 'Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.' In Acts 4:23-31, the believers gathered to pray about this situation; the thrust of their prayer was trust in the sovereignty of God, and a cry that the triumph of God's grace would be seen in the world. The result of this prayer - they all spoke the word of God boldly.

9. The Spirit of Grace

Hebrews 10:29 - 'How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by the man who has spurned the Son of God, and profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and outraged the Spirit of grace?'

Three things here linked to deliberate sinning after seeing the truth:

- (i) spurning the Son of God
- (ii) profaning the blood of the covenant which has sanctified us
- (iii) outraging the Spirit of grace

Holy Spirit is 'the Spirit of grace'; i.e. by Him grace comes to us; He brings grace and acts in grace; He knows grace and He reveals grace.

Have seen that grace is God's action in going out to sinful, needy and undeserving Man to do him good, in order to restore him and the whole creation and, through the battle against evil's attacks, to bring him to the goal of love set for him before creation began.

The Holy Spirit is the agent of this work of God. At every point in the history of grace, the Holy Spirit has been active. At creation the Holy Spirit was the agent of creation - see:

Gen. 2:7 'Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.'

Job 33:4 'The spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life.'

The Holy Spirit is also the agent of the sustaining of the world by the powerful Word of God - see:

Ps. 104:29-30 'When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. When you send forth your Spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the ground.'

The second work then of the Spirit parallels the first work in that He brings life, true life to fallen Man.

Aspects of the fact that the Spirit is the Spirit of grace:

(1) By the Spirit grace is known

John 3:1-8

- the necessity of being born 'from above/again' in order to see the Kingdom of God or to enter it.

- what is born of flesh is flesh

1Cor. 2:12

- only by the Spirit can we understand the gifts bestowed on us (?=grace) by God

- fallen Man is shut off from the Gospel apart from the Spirit's revelational work

- it is the Spirit alone who can bring this home to a person

1Cor. 2:14

- apart from the work of the Spirit, a person does not receive and cannot understand the grace of God: in fact to such a person grace seems a folly

How is it that the Spirit is able to reveal grace to us? 1Cor. 2:6-11

- the Spirit searches the depths of God and makes these things known to us in our depths.

(2) By the Spirit grace was prepared and established

God is at work constantly in salvation history (grace history) by the Spirit

- Stephen's sermon in Acts 7 is a summary of the Spirit's action in Israel's history, and the resistance of Israel to that action ('...always resisting the Holy Spirit...')

Jesus Christ was the Man of the Spirit, full of the Holy Spirit

- apart from the Spirit Christ had no ministry

- the Spirit was involved in every aspect of the ministry: his conception, childhood, baptism, ministry, sacrificial death, resurrection, and ascension

- by the power of the Spirit Christ was able to be Son, King, Saviour, Good Shepherd, Messiah, Lord etc.

- there is no grace apart from Jesus Christ and his action

(3) By the Spirit the completed work of Christ is at work in us personally

This is the theme of the whole term! The dynamic (objective) truth that the father has established in His Son is brought to us personally by the Spirit.

(4) By the Spirit a new community is formed in the Gospel

We'll see more of this in our next study.

10. The Personal and Corporate Working of Grace

There is a danger in coming to a series of studies on 'Grace Comes Into A Person' - that danger being of individualising the work of grace. There is a huge abyss between viewing a human being as an individual and as a person. To view a human being as an individual is to assume that you can know him (or yourself) without any primary regard to his (your) relationships. Relationships are not considered in this view to be part of the esse of a person. Yet a human being is a human, being; and this being a human is really only understandable in relationships. John Donne said, 'No man is an island entire to himself.' Robert Southwell said, 'Not where I breathe, but where I love, I live.' The Trinity consist of three persons in unity - the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Essential to the being of each is the relationship with the others. None of these is a monad, an entity able to stand on its own. It is true to say that the Father is the fountainhead of the Trinity; the Son is eternally begotten by Him and the Spirit eternally proceeds from Him and the Son. But His priority within the Godhead is never a priority in time, but in authority. If ever in time there was a time when He was not Father, then He is not essentially Father. His relationship with His Son and with the Spirit is part of His being the Father.

All this is to say that in coming to this topic of grace coming to a person we must see that this always has relational implications and outworkings. What is a human being? What is a person? Who am I? None of these questions is answerable apart from understanding who we are in relationship to God. And this then raises for us the purpose of creation - not our purpose, but His in creating us. So, we cannot really understand ourselves apart from understanding our destiny - the pre-destined goal that God has called us to. We have seen that this goal was given even before anything was created - Ephesians 1:3-6:

'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.'

This passage tells us the predetermined goal, namely being holy and blameless before the Father through and in Christ as beloved sons. The passage also points us to the means by which which we will brought to that goal - his glorious grace! The working of this grace is spelled out then in Ephesians 1:7-8:

'In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace which he lavished upon us.'

When then grace comes to us - when the Spirit brings us into the grace of God - this is both deeply personal and deeply reconciling. The personal and the corporate are interrelated and interdependent. Peter tells us the goal of purification of our souls in his first letter -

'Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere love of the brethren, love one another earnestly from the heart. You have been born anew, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God...' (1Peter 1:22-23).

Luke was able to typify the life of the early Christians in these words –

‘Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.’ (Acts 4:32-33)

This was no individualised or privatised life of faith, but a full bodied and full hearted life, affected and gripped in every part by the grace of God. The love of God was poured into their hearts by the Holy Spirit given, and true human life was restored and matured in them. When Paul warned the Galatians about receiving the grace of God in a vain way it was because the life they were living was out of the freshness and intimacy of relationship that grace brings. By turning away from grace and reverting to law they had in fact closed off true relating to one another.

Knowing the God of grace is the most wonderful, most intimate, most personal experience that any human being can have, and the working of His grace in our lives is extraordinary and exquisite. We will be in one sense ‘analysing’ this work this term, and that carries some dangers - that we lose the sense of wonder, joy and awe of this great work of God in us. When we are in the good of this, we want, as one woman put it to me recently, we want to embrace the world. Particularly, knowing the fulness of grace opens us up to true relationship within the community of believers.

11. The Gifts of Grace in Personal Life (1) - Repentance and Faith

Repentance is a gift of God:

Acts 5:31-32 - 'God exalted [Jesus] at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him.'

Acts 11:18 - 'When they heard this they were silenced. And they glorified God, saying, 'Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance unto life.'''

2Tim. 2:24-25 - 'The Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kindly to every one, an apt teacher, forbearing, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant that they will repent and come to know the truth...'

Likewise faith is God's gift to us:

Eph. 2:8-9 - 'For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God - not because of works, lest any man should boast.'

Phil. 1:29 - 'For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake...'

Repentance and faith are the means by which the Lord brings us into the fulness of grace; they are the means of grace to give access to grace. They are the primary actions of God in His grace to us. The phrase 'means of grace' does not mean 'the things we use or do to get grace' - that is actually an anti-grace way of thinking. Rather, the means of grace are those gifts of God in which He brings us to grace in its fulness. It is not a matter of 'getting' grace, which separates grace from God. It is a matter of 'receiving' grace, which involves us in personal encounter with God Himself. (Note that it actually involves us receiving also - this is active submission to grace. We are commanded to repent and believe - i.e. to receive these gifts from God. We may know a lot about grace without ever coming under it, or rather under the God of all grace.)

Repentance is metanoia: a change of mind, attitude and understanding. Within Eden, there was no need for this - the mind of Man was pure and undefiled, viewing God, himself and creation aright, desiring to serve God and to fulfil His plan for eternity. Romans 1:18-23 spells out the basis for the need for a change of mind:

'For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse; for although they knew God they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles.'

By wickedness, the truth of God is suppressed by humanity. Every day this is an effort on the part of Man - an active denial. Yet the judgment on this perversity is that God has darkened our minds, and caused us to become futile in our thinking - i.e. unaided by Him we could

never think aright about Him, ourselves and the creation again. Our wisdoms which we draw up for life are foolishness - as brilliant and complex and all embracing as some of these systems of wisdom are. What these systems do is lock us into idolatries.

As this spirals downwards in the affairs of men, we see that we are given over not just to a darkened mind, but a base mind (Rom. 1:28) - i.e. one set against God, His ways, and His purposes (1:32). We instead insist on our own ways, our own purposes, our own definitions of good and evil. We believe we are enlightened but are in terrible darkness. Isaiah 5:20 speaks of those who '...call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!' In Matt. 6:22-23, Jesus warned, 'The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is not sound, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!'

How great the gift of grace in repentance then! How wonderful that God would come to us and make these blind eyes, these darkened minds see! The changing of our mind about God ourselves, and His creation could never have been effected simply from our side. We would never have even seen the need for this - we could not see it. God in His grace enables us to see the need to turn from our sins - to recognise sin as sin and to see God's ways as truth. (Repentance is not the new way of living - it is the new way of viewing the world. The new way of living is the fruit that befits repentance (see Matt. 3:1-10) - i.e. the fruit that flows out of this new view of God, the world and our selves.) The gift of repentance then is the work of the Holy Spirit, and is closely linked with the gift of faith.

Faith is trust in God, having an assurance that what he says is true, acting then on the offer and promises of God, and receiving the salvation promised. Repentance occurs when the Spirit breaks open the human heart to the truth of the Gospel and the truth of God. In the same action the Spirit enables the human heart to trust the Gospel truth that has penetrated the darkness. Faith is believing the acts of God for us in His Son and receiving those acts and their fruit personally. Faith is preceded then by the grace of God - it is the actual grace of God in Christ that is the object and basis of faith. This grace needs to be proclaimed - and not in an academic or arbitrary way, but rather as the living word of Jesus Christ Himself. Faith comes from such declaration.

'The scripture says, 'No one who believes in him will be put to shame.' For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and bestows his riches upon all who call upon him. For, 'every one who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.' But how are men to call upon him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher? And how can men preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach good news!' But they have not all obeyed the gospel; for Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?' So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ.' (Rom. 10:11-17).

12. The Gifts of Grace in Personal Life (2) - Forgiveness, Purification and Justification

In Luke 24:44-53, Jesus commissioned his disciples for the ministry that was to follow His ascension:

‘Then he said to them, “These are my words which I spoke to you, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled.” Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high.” Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them, and was carried up into heaven. And they returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God.’

The disciples were commissioned to fulfil the Scripture that told of the preaching of repentance and forgiveness of sins in the name of Christ to all all nations. This was to be done in the power of the Spirit, in the blessing of Christ. Forgiveness of sins is the fruit of the grace of God in Jesus Christ. In his ministry in Palestine Jesus had constantly pointed to the forgiveness of sins at the heart of all that he was doing. As soon as the Spirit came at Pentecost, bringing home to the disciples the fulness of grace, they became proclaimers of the forgiveness of sins - see Acts 2:38, 5:31, 8:22, 10:43, 13:38, and 26:18. Four words are used in the New Testament for forgiveness (apoluein, charizesthai, aphasis, paresis), and putting together the shades of meaning in them we see that forgiveness is is the free setting aside or letting go or disregarding or writing off of a debt by the one owed. Hosea captures this in 14:4, ‘I will heal their faithlessness; I will love them freely, for my anger has turned from them.’ and Jeremiah also (quoted in various parts of the New Testament) in 31:34, ‘...I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.’

Utter freedom comes to the person who knows the total forgiveness of sins - a freedom it is impossible to compute or to tell! The sense of failure that comes to the human spirit from sin is intolerable. The Book of Common Prayer confession puts it this way: ‘We acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness, which we, from time to time, most grievously have committed, by thought, word and deed, against Thy divine majesty, provoking most justly Thy wrath and indignation against us. We do earnestly repent, and are heartily sorry for these our misdoings; the remembrance of them is grievous unto us, the burden of them is intolerable.’ The forgiveness of sins in the Gospel encompasses the entire sins of anyone’s life, since all have been borne by Christ. Never more will our sins be remembered! - not by us, not by others, and central to it all, not by God our Father. To know that there does not hang over us the fearful prospect of judgment liberates us in life. ‘Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more!’ And of course, part of that liberty is that we are also instantly a forgiving people. (See. Matt. 18:21ff, Eph. 4:32, Col. 3:13.)

Linked to forgiveness is purification or cleansing from sin. Sin has an inbuilt pollution that defiles the human heart and which contaminates all that comes from the heart. Jesus said, ‘What comes out of a man is what defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit,

licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a man.' (Mark 7:10-23). The experience of shame is linked to the pollution of sin - it is the existential knowledge that glory is lost and 'unglory' has taken its place. Shame is the deep down consciousness of sin. Perhaps it is what we call now 'a poor self image.' No amount of positive reinforcement can finally overcome this - the fact is we do fall short of the glory of God. Every human being lives with the fact of shame. What a relief to find that in the grace of God, through faith, we have been purified from our sins (Acts 22:16), that we have in our depths been purified (cleansed, washed) (1Peter 1:22, Titus 3:5), and even that our sins themselves have been purified (Isaiah 1:18):

'Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.'

In the letter to the Hebrews, the writer says, '...how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living God. (9:14)' Purification, known in the conscience and heart, is the springboard for the transformed, obedient life (cf. 2Peter 2:10 where the defiled person despises authority.) Obviously forgiveness and purification are closely linked. Both flow out of the grace of God effected for us in the Cross of Christ. No Cross, no purification and no forgiveness.

The fruit of justification also flows to us in the grace of Jesus Christ. It is intimately linked with forgiveness and also with purification. To justify means to declare and treat as just, i.e. in a right relationship with the One who administers and gives the Law. It means to exclude all possibility of condemnation. Justification thus settles the status of the person with regard to the Law and the Law-Giver. This is a very live issue in the human heart, perhaps the most burning of all. All human beings seek to justify themselves, and seem to have an inbuilt insecurity about our actions and motivations, always being on the defensive on our own behalf! We set up our own Law apart from the Law of God, but even this self-imposed law acts only to condemn and destabilise us.

Justification by grace means that through the action of Christ in the Cross we are given a sure basis for relationship with God. We have no righteousness of our own - all that we think is just and right about ourselves is exposed by the holiness of God to be filthy rags and naked shame (Isa. 64:6 - 'We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.') The Scriptures are excruciatingly clear that we cannot redress this by some later obedience to the Law, for 'by works of the Law shall no one be justified.' (See Gal. 2:16, Psa. 143:2.) The grace of God has moved in history in Christ to deal with the judgment of the Law, and to set us free from its penalty. This comes to us freely, but at great cost to Christ. The effect of justification is to set us at peace with God, no longer fearful of judgment, and to have a new relationship to the Law of God which we see clearly now in the Spirit as desirable as the way of life in God.

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In the Cross, Christ bore the presence, the power, the pollution and the penalty of sin. Because of this these latter three are no longer tyrants of the person who has come to faith. We eagerly await the time too when even all presence of sin is removed from us and the whole creation. But until then, what joy, liberty, peace and delight we can know in the grace of God as forgiven, cleansed, and justified people. By faith all the life of heaven is open to us now; we simply await the sight of all that we know now only by faith, but which we know so richly and deeply.

13. The Gifts of Grace in Personal Life (3) - Regeneration and Adoption

1. Regeneration

The noun 'regeneration' (Gk: *palingenesia*) occurs only twice in the whole of the Scriptures. The first is in Matthew 19:28, where it refers to the 'new world' of the end of time renewal of all things, and this sets the wider framework to understand the other reference, in Titus 3:4-7: 'But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life.'

Here the focus is not on the cosmic renewal, but on the personal dimension of regeneration. Whilst the Scriptures are no full of explicit references to this work of God in His grace, the fact of regeneration permeates the Scriptures, expressed in different words.

Regeneration is also known as 'new birth', and speaks of the inner re-creating of fallen human nature by the gracious and sovereign action of the Holy Spirit. Geoffrey Bingham says in *Great and Glorious Grace*, 'Nothing can be regenerated which has not first been generated.' This gift of God to us is based then in the fact of creation. Paul says in 2Corinthians 5:17, 'Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come.' Better to say, 'the old things have become new things!' Regeneration is not about a substituted creation, but the old creation renewed. It is God fulfilling His purposes for this creation, not Him wiping the slate clean and beginning again.

This regeneration is 'in Christ.' The refurbishment of the human spirit is not possible from the human end. Just as children do not contribute to their own procreation, so the new birth is God's gift to us, not something to which we can contribute. John says, 'But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.' Jesus in speaking to Nicodemus on this matter, said to him, 'You must be born again (or from above = another)' (John 3:3) and linked this to being born of water and the Spirit (John 3:5), i.e. through the purification from sins that the Spirit brings when He applies to us the work of Christ. Paul puts this all so clearly in Ephesians 2:1-5:

'And you he made alive, when you were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience. Among these we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of body and mind, and so we were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)...

This happened to us when we heard the Gospel of Christ and received it in faith: 'You have been born anew, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; for "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord abides for ever." That word is the good news which was preached to you.' (1Pet 1:23-25)

Regeneration is 'in Christ.' it is important to see that it is not simply restoration of Adam. Rather, regeneration is in the second Adam. 'For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.' (1Cor 15. 21-22) We boast more blessings than our father lost! Christ took on humanity for ever at the incarnation, and through the Cross and resurrection he has matured humanity.

In John's first letter, he speaks much about being 'born of God' or being 'of God.' This speaks of the regenerate person. We see there that 'No one born of God commits sin; for God's nature abides in him, and he cannot sin because he is born of God (1John 3:9)' and also, 'For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith (1John 5:4).' There is a change of disposition in the person who has been born again, away from disobedience and lawlessness, to trust, love and obedience. It is regeneration which energises the will for free obedience to God. Part of this obedience is seen in love for the brethren: 'Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love. (1John 4:7-8)' When we see the outflow of love in the community created on Pentecost, then we must say that that day was a day of regeneration, that men and women received the grace of God and were born again.

2. Adoption

As would be clear from the above, regeneration is closely linked to our becoming children of God. The reality of adoption as God's sons is perhaps best expressed in Galatians 4:4-7:

'But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So through God you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then an heir.'

A number of things become clear in this passage:

*adoption is about more than being by creation the children of God; it is participation in Christ's own Sonship. In Hebrews 2, we read of these words being on the lips of Christ, 'Here I am and the children you have given me' and we see there also that Christ is not ashamed to call us His brethren.

*forgiveness is not the end of salvation - adoption as God's sons, i.e. a fully reconciled relationship is the goal of the work of grace in Christ. Adoption is grounded on the forgiveness of sins.

*it is the Spirit who is the agent of adoption; by the Spirit we cry, 'Abba! Father!' No greater cry can pass human lips. See also Romans 8:14-17.

*adoption liberates us from slavery into the freedom of the Son. All the freedom of Christ is ours! Hence, we have freedom and boldness to approach the throne of grace, i.e. the Father of grace. See Hebrews 10:19, Ephesians 3:12. Note the freedom and boldness of the apostles and believers in Acts - not presumption, but boldness in the face of opposition, and

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freedom in the grace and justification in which they stood. The freedom that is ours in adoption is to be guarded. 'For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.' (Gal. 5:1) I.e. to come under the law as the way to justification or maturity is opposed to the liberty of the Spi1_rit of adoption. Earlier (Gal. 2:4) Paul spoke of the false brethren who spied out the freedom that was the church's in Christ Jesus, in order to bring them into bondage.

*adoption is with a view to inheritance - i.e. there is a culmination and fulfilling of all that we have received in grace to come. This inheritance is part of the gift of adoption. See also Romans 8:23, Colossians 3:24

The fact of adoption personally also means we are placed through the grace of God in the Gospel in a new family. This inevitably leads to brotherly love, or love for the brethren. We will see more this next week.

14. The Gifts of Grace in Personal Life (4) - Love

The action of God in grace is clearly shown in the Scriptures to arise from the love of God. God's love is gracious love. Hence, John in his Gospel tells us,

'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.' (John 3:16)

And likewise in his first letter, he says,

'By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.' (1John 3:16)

'In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins.' (1John 4:9-10)

Paul puts it this way in Romans 5:

'But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.' (Rom. 5:8)

The grace of God in Jesus Christ came from the love of God. It is the love at the heart of grace that is perhaps most melting and breaking of the stubborn human heart; nothing can conquer a sinner to repentance but the revelation of love. This love of the Father moved him to expend all of His resources, even His very self in the giving up of His Son on winning us back to Himself.

Paul tells us that it is by the gift of the Spirit that God's love is poured into our hearts (Rom. 5:5). We have seen previously that the outpouring of the Spirit is the fruit of the action of God in grace. And we have seen that none of the personal fruit of grace in life is possible outside of the fulness of the Spirit. Just as we have seen that to receive the grace of God is not receive some substance called 'grace' but to receive God Himself in His gracious kindness to us, so also to receive the love of God is not to receive something that we keep and treasure, but rather to have the great God of love enter our hearts and beings.

Apart from the grace of God, a person is caught up in the actuality of guilt, even if not consciously in the experience of guilt. This motivates a person to isolate themselves. And so by suppressing guilt, by holding it in and keeping it under guard, under control, a person is unable to move out to others in love. Only the grace of God can enable us to live outside ourselves, to break out of the isolation of self-justification. To encounter God in His grace is to encounter Him who moved out of Himself for us, Him who counted us better than Himself, Him who freely gave out of the depths of His being.

Thus, the person of grace becomes a lover. This love is from God; we love because He first loved us (1John 4:19). yet it is not adequate to say that we are simply channels of God's love. We love! Jesus summarised the law to us in this way:

'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets.' (Matt. 22:37-40)

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This love is to be from the totality of ourselves. Of course such love can only be loved by being in the God who is love. Yet such love enters us; it does not simply flow through us. Otherwise, it would mean nothing at all to say, 'I love you, Lord.' Out of the heart flow streams of living water, not simply through the heart.

To call upon another, to address another, is primary in the action of love. To address a person is to interrupt them; to be addressed is to be called out of your own self-preoccupation. When we are addressed by God, when we hear His voice in the Gospel we are called out of ourselves by Him who in speaking to us moves out of Himself to us. The grace and love of God is that He has spoken to a rebel race that ignored His voice: 'Adam, where are you?' 'And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us...' (See too the woman who touched the hem of Jesus's robe and was addressed by Him, and so brought into grace. See Matt. 9:20-22, Mark 5:24b-34) The sign of the person who has received the grace of God is that he or she is one who now speaks with and worships God - 'Oh God, you are my God, and I will ever praise you!' In so doing we go out from ourselves to another, not losing ourselves in so doing, but actually finding ourselves.

In the grace of God, love flows from us to the Triune God, to one another within the family of God, and out into the world. Not only does the person who has received the grace of God become a lover, but the family of God, the community which is formed by God through His grace, is marked by love. This love is toward God and toward one another and toward the world. Most failures and breakdowns in the church are failures and breakdowns of love. In the epistles, there are exhortations and encouragements concerning the love that is to flow in the fellowship. Part of this flow of love is agreement - the avoiding of unnecessary division and instead the pursuing of the harmony of love. Given the fact that Paul in his epistles commands and exhorts to love in the church over 40 times, we are to recognise the essential nature of love in the church. This commanded action is given and sustained by the grace of God.

The love which has come to us and entered into us through faith the Gospel is love which moves out also to the world, in word and deed, to make known the God of love to all men and women. In the book of Acts there is very little mention of 'love', but love is everywhere in the life of the church and in its proclamation.

15. *The Gifts of Grace in Personal Life (5) - Holiness*

The New Testament abounds in urgency for the necessity of holiness in personal life, and in our corporate life as the church. For example,

‘Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, and make holiness perfect in the fear of God.’ (2Cor. 7:1)

‘Strive for peace with all men, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.’ (Heb. 12:14)

‘...but as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct...’ (1Pet. 1:15)

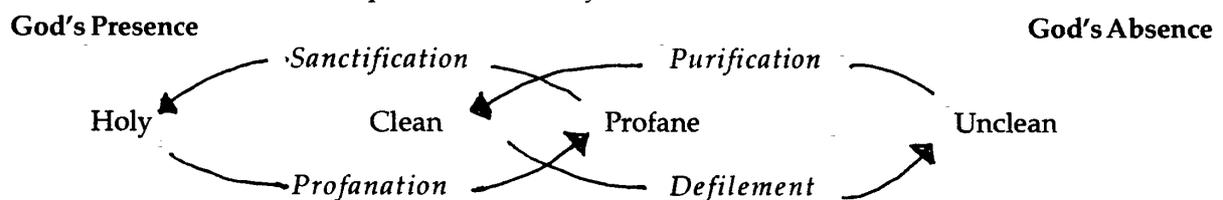
‘For God has not called us for uncleanness, but in holiness.’ (1Thess. 4:7)

Closely linked to holiness is purity or cleanness, although these two are not entirely interchangeable.

One of the problems in encountering this topic is that so often as Christians we are trying to make happen what God has already given as a gift. Paul told us in Ephesians 1:3, ‘Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places...’ This blessing has happened; we are now in receipt of every spiritual blessing, through Christ. Pride would like to achieve or warrant or merit these blessings. One of the blessings of the grace of God to us is holiness (‘...even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.’ (Eph. 1:4)) Much of our contemporary Christian culture implies that holiness is the result of our own activity.

What we need to see is that holiness, from go to whoa, is a gift of God and the fruit of His grace. There is the crisis of sanctification, the initial bringing of a person into holiness; then there is the exercise of holiness in a life of purity. Both aspects of holiness are wholly of grace.

Defining holiness is difficult - in fact impossible. It is an attempt to reduce to words the very character and being and action of God! The Old Testament worship indicated something of the nature of God’s holiness. Holiness and purity are separate, but related, categories. Purity is also called cleanness; impurity is uncleanness. Holiness has its opposite in profanity, or commonness. John Kleinig illustrates these two related polarities this way:



Holiness is that state conferred to people or objects by the presence of God. Holy things or holy people were set aside for divine use. Common or profane is then not a derogatory term, but an indication that such items were for ordinary or common usage. Everything that is not

holy is profane/common. (This state of commonness gets only one mention - Lev. 10:10 - although there are a number of ways in which Israel are warned against profaning holy things.) Common things could be either clean or unclean. Uncleanliness or impurity was totally incompatible with the presence of God, and so cleansing, purification had to take place before such an item could come into contact with God in a way which led to blessing. Contact between the Holy One and the unclean one led to death. In creation nothing was initially holy or unclean - it was all very good, but still needed the sanctifying work of God to become holy. Clean profanity is the 'groundstate' of creation - holiness or uncleanness are variations from this starting point. The Sabbath day was the day of blessing and sanctification, and the extension of Eden's boundaries was the mandate given to the man and the woman ('...fill the earth...' understood rightly as fill the earth with the sanctity, communion and worship of the Lord found within Eden). Holiness was still to come, but planned for, and planned for the whole world (see Eph. 1:3ff).

Our becoming holy is a work of God in His grace. When we received the Gospel of Christ we were sanctified, we were made holy. This is clear in the following verses:

'But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God chose you from the beginning to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.' (2Thess. 2:13)

'Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor sexual perverts, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.' (1Cor. 6:11)

'...that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.' (Acts 26:18)

'To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours.' (1Cor. 1:2)

'And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.' (Heb. 10:10)

Putting these things together we see that holiness is God's gift to us in the Gospel. We could not live holy lives unless the grace of God had effected holiness in us. This sanctification is linked to the purification and cleansing which comes in the forgiveness of sins. This is only possible because of the once-for-all offering of Christ's body for sins.

Having sanctified us, God then enables us to live holy lives. This is the work of His grace in us, leading us to obey Him and live for Him. In Titus 2:11-14 we see that this obedience flows out of the work of God in us:

'For the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men, training us to renounce irreligion and worldly passions, and to live sober, upright, and godly lives in this world, awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.'

All the injunctions to live holy lives are given in the light of the ever present grace of God.

This holy living is not abstract or unrelated to the world in which we have our lives. Holiness is connected to every part of our lives as created men and women. 'And on that day

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there shall be inscribed on the bells of the horses, “Holy to the LORD.” And the pots in the house of the LORD shall be as the bowls before the altar; and every pot in Jerusalem and Judah shall be sacred to the LORD of hosts, so that all who sacrifice may come and take of them and boil the flesh of the sacrifice in them. And there shall no longer be a trader in the house of the LORD of hosts on that day.’ (Zech. 14:20-21) This means that there is a domesticity about the grace of sanctification. Ephesians 4:22-24 says, ‘Put off your old nature which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, 24 and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.’ The outworking of this is spelled out in some practical details in the following verses and chapters. Similarly Romans 12 spells out the very practical nature of living in the grace of sanctification.

John Kleinig, *Sharing In God’s Holiness*, paper for Lutheran General Pastors’ Conference, 1984

16. The Gifts of Grace in Personal Life (6) - Eternal Life

The number of times the New Testament speaks of the promise of eternal life to those who trust in Christ is staggering! A number of times people come inquiring of Christ how they can know or inherit eternal life (Matt. 19:16, Mark 10:17, Luke 10:25, 18:18). Eternal life is a free gift; Paul says in Romans 6:23, 'For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.' This eternal life is not earned but is given (*carisma*), and is given in Christ Jesus our Lord; it is of grace and is known by faith. As we explore what this eternal life is as shown to us in the Scriptures, then we see that it is a breathtaking gift.

Eternal life is contrasted with death, and also with judgment. So, in Matthew 18:8, 'And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to enter life maimed or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire....' Jesus contrasts a life that is to be entered still and the eternal fire which is imposed as judgment. Eternal life then is a destiny or future guaranteed us by God in His grace which involves no element of judgment or condemnation, but rather liberty and reward and communion with God.

This links eternal life and the resurrection. We are raised into (or in) eternal life. If there is no resurrection, then Christ has not been raised, and there is no eternal life and then we are still in our sins (1Cor. 15:12ff). That is, if there is no resurrection we are still under judgment. We are of all people most to be pitied if this is the case, Paul tells us - that is, if the Gospel is just nice ideas about God and Jesus, and not the actual reality of what God has done for us.

Eternal life is not simply unending life, although it is unending. In Revelation 21:3-4, a voice from the throne of God proclaims, 'Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away.' Some wonder about the prophecy in Isaiah 65:17-20 which pre-echoes this statement from the Lord: 'For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. But be glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and be glad in my people; no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress. No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or an old man who does not fill out his days, for the child shall die a hundred years old, and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed.' Some feel that this indicates that there is death in the new heaven and new earth. This needs to be read as poetry, and the focus in the poetic language is not on death's power but on its defeat. Also this needs to be read in the light of the New Testament and the resurrection of Jesus - the event which unfolded the Old Testament.

Eternal life is not simply promised as a reward to enjoy in the future, but is a reality which we enter in grace, and which we see in its fulness at the end of the age. John in his Gospel and letters shows the fact that eternal life is now.

'Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life; he does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.' (John 5:24)

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‘He who believes in the Son has eternal life; he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God rests upon him.’ (John 3:36)

‘Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life.’ (John 6:47)

‘My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand.’ (John 10:27-28)

‘And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. (1John 5:11)’

‘I write this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life. (1John 5:13)’

Because of this, we have a new view of death, and so of life now. Death no longer tyrannises us, nor holds us in fear. ‘Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same nature, that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage. (Heb. 2:14-15)’ At the heart of all fear is the fear of death, and at the heart of the fear of death is the fear of judgment. At the heart of the fear of judgment is guilt, and behind all our guilt is the reality of our sin. The gift of eternal life is linked to the promise that judgment has passed, that our sins are forgiven, that our guilt is paid for. No wonder the prophet Isaiah could proclaim comfort to the people of God: ‘Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD’s hand double for all her sins. (Isa. 40:1-2)’

Those who have come to know and receive the grace of God and so who have entered eternal life will not see death. Jesus said ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, if any one keeps my word, he will never see death. (John 8:51)’ This is because in the eternal life given by grace, we never die. ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that a man may eat of it and not die. (John 6:47-50)’ Undoubtedly many Christians have had bodily deaths - and we await the resurrection of the body. Yet such a person has not seen death, but rather entered into glory and into the fulness of eternal life. All this is contained in Jesus’ words in John 6, especially verses 53-54: ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. (John 6:53-54)’

The communion we have with God is the key feature of this eternal life. The endlessness of life is not the key feature. Jesus said, ‘And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. (John 17:3)’ So, the eternal life we have entered through God’s work of grace is the life of fellowship with the Father and the Son. Eternal life is then known in the fulness of the Spirit. But what an abundant life it is! Jesus said, ‘I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. (John 10:10)’ Fellowship with the Father and Son in the Spirit is the most dynamic reality we can know.

Such is the promise and reality of eternal life that we are given a great motivation and power in life. Paul urges Timothy to ‘take hold of the eternal life’ to which he was called. That is, he is called to eternal life - this is God’s gracious election - and has been given eternal life. Timothy is to start to live as dynamically as he can now in the truth of eternal life. He is not to let life dwindle away or to slip by. Jesus spoke of those who lose their life by loving it - that is who by living for now (and so avoiding suffering) lose (eternal) life - and of those who by

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hating their life now ('in this world') gain it for eternal life (John 12:25) - that is who by bearing with the suffering that comes from faith in Christ and so remaining faithful to Him keep their lives.

17. The Grace of Ministry

‘Any ministry we have is a gift of God, a high privilege and a deep responsibility.’ (Great and Glorious Grace, p.89) When we come to the matter of ministry (=diakonia: service) we may think in terms of our doing for God before we think in terms of God’s doing for us in this matter. All ministry is given to us by God; it is part of the action of His grace in our lives. Paul says in Ephesians 2:2:4-10 -

‘But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God - not because of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.’

Every good work has been prepared for us to walk in; therefore we don’t have a basis for boasting to God in our good works. rather we have cause for thanksgiving that good works are given for us to walk in. When God moves in His grace in a person’s life, he or she becomes one who is caught up in God’s action and purposes for the world. In this action of grace, God also provides for each person the particular and personal ways in which that outflow in the action and purposes of God will take place in that person’s life. Any person who has come to new life in Christ but who is not caught up into the adventure of ministry needs to be filled afresh with Spirit of God. No one who has been called and converted by the grace of God could remain silent on that score!

Paul’s statements concerning himself and the ministry God gave him exemplifies this for us. We may be hesitant to look at Paul for this, but his greatness as a man of God should not deter us. Paul is clear that there was no distinction between his being called to life in Christ and his being called to the particular ministry of apostle to the Gentiles. His conversion was with a view to his preaching the Gospel, especially to the Gentiles. ‘But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles... (Gal. 1:15-16)’ In a number of his letters he introduces himself with the statement of his calling to be an apostle by the will of God (see the first verses of Rom., 1Cor., 2Cor., Gal., Eph., Col., 1Tim., 2Tim., Tit.) He is perhaps clearest about this in Romans 15:15-16 -

‘But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.’

The grace of God was both the ground and the power of all his ministry. The Gospel itself was the strong constraint that drove Paul on. Because he knew the grace of God, he had to tell the grace of God. ‘The love of God constrains us! (2Cor. 5:14)’

Paul's particular ministry was that of apostleship. Not all ministry is the same; each person has particular good works that he or she has been called to walk in. Each person is called to ministry. Ministry is always linked to God's purposes for the world. A deficient view of ministry has probably arisen from our ancient view of 'clergy' and 'laity'. We think of the ministry of the first being of a higher level than the ministry of the second, if we even think of their works as ministry. In the new Testament there were only laity - i.e. the laos or people of God. Apostles, elders were leadership, and deacons, deaconesses were aides, within that people, but all constituted the people of God.

The exhortations and instructions in the New Testament letters covered all aspects of life, and not simply 'spiritual' aspects of life. What perhaps had been common in Old Testament terms was now sanctified. There was no distinction between sacred and secular life. This has been a strong emphasis in the teaching of Protestant theology (although in practice it may not have been the governing thought.) Luther said,

'When a maid cooks and cleans and does other housework, because God's command is there, even such a small work must be praised as a service of God far surpassing the holiness and asceticism of all monks and nuns.'

'Your work is a very sacred matter. God delights in it, and through it he wants to bestow his blessing on you.'

'Household work has no appearance of sanctity; and yet these very works in connection with the household are more desirable than all the works of all the monks and nuns.... Seemingly secular works are a worship of God and an obedience well pleasing to God.'

'[If we would look upon all work as a form of service to God] the entire world would be full of service to God, not only the churches but also the home, the kitchen, the cellar, the workshop, and the field of townsfolk and farmers.'

Calvin also said,

'It is an error that those who flee worldly affairs and engage in contemplation are leading an angelic life.... We know that men were created to busy themselves with labour and that no sacrifice is more pleasing to God than when each one attends to his calling and studies to live well for the common good.'

'There is no part of our life or conduct which should not be related to the glory of God.'

This approach has at its heart love for God and neighbour. Every job is consequential because it becomes the arena for glorifying God and the opportunity for expressing love through service to one's neighbour. We serve God not simply in the work situations we are placed, but through them.

Romans 12:3-8 picks up this matter, and leads also into the study next week when we look at the spiritual gifts.

'For by the grace given to me I bid every one among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith which God has assigned him. For as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; he who teaches, in his teaching; he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who contributes, in liberality; he who gives aid, with zeal; he who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.'

18. The Old Gifts Of Grace Made New

We have seen through this term a number of the personal gifts of grace which have come to us in the action of God for us in Jesus Christ. These gifts all have a corporate dimension - the personal is not the same as the individual. In addition to these personal gifts, God gives gifts to the new community for its life and ministry - some are 'old' and some are 'new'. The 'new gifts' are the charismata mentioned in 1Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4 and 1Peter 4. By 'old gifts' we mean those mentioned by Paul in Romans 9:4-5 -

'They are Israelites, and to them belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ. God who is over all be blessed for ever. Amen.'

These gifts to the Israelites in the Old Testament promises now belong to the new community, the people of God in Christ. We know this from Ephesians 3:6 -

'...that is, how the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel....'

Everything that was given to Israel is now the inheritance of the nations through Jesus Christ. The Church is now the 'Israel of God.' Undoubtedly the New Covenant fulfilment of the Old Testament promises give a different and new slant on these promises. Yet what is important to see all these gifts are (i) ours through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ; and (ii) are indispensable to our life as God's 'people of grace' in the world.

The Old Gifts Made New In The Grace of Christ

(i) The Sonship

We have seen that each member of the church is a son or daughter of God by adoption. What is distinctive about sonship in the Old Testament is that it was corporate; Israel the nation was the son of God, for example Exod. 4:22-23 - 'Thus says the LORD, Israel is my first-born son, and I say to you, 'Let my son go that he may serve me...'' As Christians we belong to the "sonly" people in Christ who is the Son. He revealed God's Fatherhood and he gave us participation in that Fatherhood. Thus the new graced people of God in Christ are even more familial than the old!

(ii) The Glory

For Israel to be given the glory meant primarily that the God of glory dwelt with them and gave them access to Him. To enter the glory was to also receive the glory - hence Moses' face shone with glory when he came down from the mountain. Glory is linked with holiness, and so this glory was always a threat as well as a gift, and there needed to be a degree of separation from the glory. Not only was it threat, but the participation in the glory was a passing one, and it faded away. 2Corinthians 3:7-13 speaks of this glory and contrasts it with the full(er) gift of glory that is ours in Christ:

'Now if the dispensation of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such splendor that the Israelites could not look at Moses' face because of its brightness, fading as this was, will not the dispensation of the Spirit be attended with greater splendor? For if there was splendor in the dispensation of condemnation, the dispensation of righteousness must far exceed it in splendor. Indeed, in this case, what once had splendor has come to have no splendor at all, because of the splendor that surpasses it. For if what faded away came with splendor, what is permanent must have much more splendor. Since we have such a hope, we are very bold, not like Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not see the end of the fading splendor.'

Because of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, life is not a downhill run from our encounter with the Lord in conversion! It is a life of progressing from one degree of glory to another (2Cor. 3:18)! God is conforming us, through the times and tides of our lives, to the image of His Son.

(iii) The Covenants

The church knows only one covenant - the New Covenant - which they recognise to be the fulfilling of all the other covenants, especially that made with Abraham. This is clear in the Song of Zechariah in Luke 1:68-79. Covenant is almost synonymous with grace - it is God's unilateral action to establish a bonded and unbreakable relationship with us. Jesus spoke of the New Covenant being in his blood - and so the basis of this bonded relationship is the forgiveness of sins through the death of Christ.

(iv) The Law

Deuteronomy 4:7-8 says, 'For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? And what great nation is there, that has statutes and ordinances so righteous as all this law which I set before you this day?' Israel did not see the Law as a heavy imposition, but rather as a delight, a gift of God in His incomparable kindness. See Psalms 1, 19 and 119 for this rich delight! The Law of God was a preceptual exposition of God's own character and being. Christians even more love the law of God, for in the New Covenant the Law of God is written on our hearts (Jer. 31:31-34.) The Law is the Law of Christ (Gal. 6:2, 1Cor. 9:21) or the royal law of love, the law of liberty (James 1:22-25, 2:8-12). Grace does not oppose law and leave us lawless - in fact grace comes to the lawless and trains us to renounce irreligion and worldly passions and live sober, upright and godly lives in this world.

(v) The Worship

Israel was given a special form of worship in the Mosaic covenant, but there is the fact that each time the patriarchs encountered the Lord they responded in worship (see e.g. Gen.12:7, 21:33, 28:18, 35:1, 9-15, etc.) (The Mosaic covenant worship itself was established when Israel was saved out of Egypt to worship - i.e. when the Abrahamic covenant had this particular outworking in history.) The gift of worship is the outflow of meeting the God of all grace. Undoubtedly there was worship in Eden, which was transmogrified into idolatry through the rebellion of sin. Through the grace of Christ the wonderful worship given to Israel even is overshadowed. Jesus said, 'Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth (John 4:21-24)', indicating that the worship brought by the Spirit of grace poured out will be of an order not seen before; it is in fact a participation in the worship within the Godhead.

(vi) The Promises

These promises to Israel related to the Davidic kingship, the coming of Messiah, and to the establishment of God's universal kingdom with Israel at its centre. For the new community these promises are fulfilled in Christ's advent. The Kingdom of heaven is at hand! The events of Christ's death, resurrection and ascension, and the outpouring of the promised Spirit (Acts 2:33) are the critical events in the establishing of the promises. There is the continued working of Christ to bring all things under this established rule (1Cor. 15:20-28).

(vii) The Human Ancestry Of Christ

The Israelites had the particular honour and joy of being the ancestors of Christ; he was descended from them 'according to the flesh'. In grace, Christ and His bride become one flesh (Eph. 5:31-33). The goal of grace is that we ourselves in Christ become participants in the divine nature (2Peter. 1:3-4). 'You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich yet for your sake he became poor, so that through his poverty you might become rich.' (2Cor. 8:9) Christ takes on our ancestry and gives us His future! Amazing grace indeed!

19. Great Grace's Greater Grace

It may seem odd to start a term entitled 'Grace takes Us Into The Future' with a study that seems to jump right to the very end. In fact, there is a lot of logic - theologic - about such an approach. Christian people live in hope; hope is the great dynamic motivator of the Christian person and the church. Following this study, we will look at studies on:

- (20) The Grace of God and the Fruit of the Spirit
- (21) The Grace of God and the Gifts of the Spirit
- (22) Grace and Ministry
- (23) Grace and Obedience
- (24) Graceless Law, Lawless Grace and the Grace of Law
- (25) The Grace That Heals
- (26) Grace and Worship
- (27) Grace Going Out to All the World

The grace of God that is yet to come

In a number of places in the New Testament, it is clear that there is a fulness to the reality of God's grace that still lies ahead of us as Christians. Some of these places are listed here:

'Therefore gird up your minds, be sober, set your hope fully upon the grace that is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1Pet. 1:13).'

'For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect; but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood (1Cor. 13:9-12).'

'Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is (1John 3:2).'

'Through him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God (Rom. 5:2).'

There is a fulness to the grace given in us Christ that will only be known at the end of time, in the world to come. We know the grace of God brilliantly now, at times seeing even more than we think we can bear, but we must realise that it is 'through a glass, darkly.' The glory that we'll be and see then will far outshine the glory that is now.

The grace that has already come

Christ was the grace of God among us, bringing salvation to us. He appeared full of grace and truth. The grace that came in him was abundant and glorious and sufficient (more than sufficient - super-abounding) for the world and the human race. Romans 5:12-21 makes this very clear:

12 Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned - 13 sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. 14 Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come. 15 But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift in

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the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. 16 And the free gift is not like the effect of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification. 17 If, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. 18 Then as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man's act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men. 19 For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous. 20 Law came in, to increase the trespass; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, 21 so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

There is great life opened to us in this grace; but if this grace were only for this life, and not for the life to come also, then we would be of all most to be pitied. Grace comes to us now in order that we grow and mature spiritually, but we live now in anticipation of what is yet to be. At the present time, all that we know, we know by faith. We mustn't say 'only by faith' as though there were something less than dynamic or something unreal about this. Yet there is a time coming when we will know these things by sight rather than just by faith. Those things we know by faith are forgiveness, purification and cleansing, sanctification, sonship, glorification, eternal life.

So the grace that has already come is the same grace of God that will come to us at the end. We cannot conceive, we have never seen or heard the things that are prepared for us then, but these things are made known to us now in some way in the present by the Spirit (1Cor. 2:9-10). We have the first-fruits of the Spirit (Rom. 8:23), and the ministry of the Spirit opens the eyes of faith more and more to the glories of grace to come. So in Eph. 1:15-23 Paul prays for the church:

15 For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, 16 I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, 17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, 18 having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe, according to the working of his great might 20 which he accomplished in Christ when he raised him from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come; 22 and he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, 23 which is his body, the fulness of him who fills all in all.

(Note that in this passage, the power which takes us into the future is the power that was exercised in the resurrection and exaltation of Christ. The grace to come is the full-flowering of the grace that has been given.)

The things of grace to come

Revelation 21 and 22 portray the great riches that are to come in the full of time as the fruit of God's work of grace in His Son. the elements we see there are:

- (i) full glorification of the people of God (21:2) - a sharing in the transfiguration glory of Christ who was disfigured for us
- (ii) the marriage of the Church and the Lamb (21:2) - from Christ's taking on our infidelity and faithlessness
- (iii) the dwelling of God with His people (21:3a) - from Christ's incarnation and rescue of rebels
- (iv) the abolition of death, crying, mourning, pain through the passing away of the former things (21:3b-4) - from Christ who bore our griefs and carried our sorrows, and who bore the 'former things' in his own body on the tree
- (iv) the opening of the fountain of life to the thirsty (21:6) - see John 7:37-39

...and so on.

20. The Grace Of God And The Fruit Of The Spirit

'16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. 17 For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law. 19 Now the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, 21 envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law. 24 And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.' (Gal. 5:16-25)

In his letter to the church in Galatia Paul deals with the failure of the Christians there to remain true to the Gospel and their abandoning of it for another Gospel which is no gospel. The Gospel of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ is more than sufficient for Christian maturity; the Galatians had reverted to a 'law-way' for maturity rather than continuing to walk by faith and in the Spirit. We will look at these issues more fully in later studies on obedience, law and grace. What we will focus on in this study is the relationship between the grace of God and the fruit of the Spirit. What Paul shows is that to abandon grace for law kills the reality of the fruit of the Spirit in personal life. Peter takes this up also in his second letter, pointing out that where there is failure to grow and mature in the life of the Spirit, there is forgetfulness concerning God's grace:

'5 For this very reason make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, 6 and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, 7 and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. 8 For if these things are yours and abound, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 For whoever lacks these things is blind and shortsighted and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.' (2Pet. 1:5-9)

In Galatians 5:16-25 Paul contrasts walking by the Spirit and doing the deeds of the flesh. Verse 16 can be translated as a command followed by a command as in the RSV text above, or a command followed by an indicative (or promise), i.e. '...walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.' Certainly the two are seen as mutually exclusive; the principle of the passage as a whole is 'if we walk by the Spirit, then the lust of thrust of the flesh will not succeed.'

'Spirit' and 'flesh' are powers which operate on a human being; they are not parts of the human being, but rather systems which influence human beings. One is either born of the Spirit of God, or in the flesh. The flesh is Man's pattern of operating on his own apart from God. This brings him into partnership with all that is opposed to God, and so is part of an evil system embracing Satan, his powers, the world-system, and death.

Christians are those who are born of the Spirit and live by the Spirit, and are not under debt to the flesh (Rom. 8:12, Col. 2:11-15). In fact, Gal. 5:24 tells us that we have 'crucified the flesh with its passions and desires' - this happened when Christ died on the Cross, and by faith the believer has seen, assented to and desired that death. Because of this we ought to keep in step with the Spirit and do this only.

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All this should make very clear to us that ‘the fruit of the Spirit’ could also be called ‘the fruit of grace.’ The Spirit is the Spirit of grace, and so the Spirit is He who realises and applies the grace of God to us personally. We see that the fruit of the Spirit is the Spirit’s work in us, not the result of our own moral effort. It is His fruit, not ours. This fruit is brought to bear through the Gospel. The fruit of the Spirit cannot be produced over and above, or in addition to the Gospel. It takes the whole Gospel of grace for a person to be able to be fruitful in the Spirit.

(It is true that each element of the fruit is commanded to us in various places in the New Testament (e.g 1John 4:7, Php. 4:4, Col. 3:15, 1Thess. 5:14, Eph. 4:32, Gal. 6:10, Rev. 2:10, Tit. 3:2, 2Pet. 1:6) but that is simply the command to walk in step with the Spirit writ large! Also, just as we cannot pick and choose which of the commands of God we will keep, but are given the law of God as a whole, so too the fruit of the Spirit is a whole package. In fact, it is not possible to have one element without the others. The grace of God produces a whole harvest!)

The fruit of the Spirit is a participation in the character and being of God. The Spirit takes the things of God and makes them known to us (John 16:12-15). So the love that we love with by the Spirit is the love of God (1John 4:7); the joy that we rejoice in is the joy that is in Christ and that he has put in us (John 15:11, 17:13); the peace that is given to us is the peace of God which passes all understanding (Php. 4:7); and so on. As we have seen over these studies on grace, grace is not simply a substance. Grace is God coming to us personally and acting for us. Likewise the gifts and outcomes of grace are all contained in relationship with God, not simply as some goodies we can have separate from Him. For all these reasons, the way ahead in practical experience and real living in the fruit of the Spirit is to continue to be filled with, to be led by, to be aglow with, to walk in, to keep in step with the Holy Spirit, and conversely not to quench, not to grieve, not to resist the Holy Spirit. This will mean a constant refreshment in the grace and forgiveness of God, adoration of the God of grace, and obedient walking with the Lord by grace.

21. The Grace Of God And The Gifts Of The Spirit

‘7 The end of all things is at hand; therefore keep sane and sober for your prayers. 8 Above all hold unflinching your love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sins. 9 Practice hospitality ungrudgingly to one another. 10 As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: 11 whoever speaks, as one who utters oracles of God; whoever renders service, as one who renders it by the strength which God supplies; in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.’ (1Peter 4:7-11)

In this section of his first letter, Peter is giving instruction to the Christian community for its life and witness. We see that the nearness of the fulfilling of God's purposes for creation is the motivation for vigilant and diligent Christian living (v. 7). This will issue particularly in the life of love within the church, which is particularly an expression of grace (v. 8). This love will flow out in hospitality to one another (v. 9). The grace that comes to us in Christ and by the Spirit issues in each of us having a gift (at least one!), and the responsibility in grace then is to use that gift, as a good steward. This grace is a varied grace, and so the gifts God brings to his people in this grace are varied and so will meet many needs and do so in different ways.

There is a direct link here between the grace of God and the gifts we're given for ministry. The gifts come to us by grace, and they are given so that through us God Himself ministers His grace to people. The gifts are not themselves grace - only God's grace is grace! - but they are given to us to participate in God's action of grace. Those who have gifts must recognise that they have them as gifts - see 1Corinthians 4:7 - and that thus they give glory not to the possessor, but to the giver! The gifts are given to glorify God, and we would use them properly thinking only of God's glory (not our own) for that is what our life in grace is about. (Where a person seeks to gain glory for himself or herself through the possession of gifts, in fact he or she is indicating that there is an uncertainty deep down about the reality of grace. Those who are seeking glory don't realise the glory that is given in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and so are trying to compensate.)

4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all. 7 But grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. 8 Therefore it is said, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men." 9 (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? 10 He who descended is he who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)

11 And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ; 14 so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles. 15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love.' (Ephesians 4:4-16)

What is clear here is that what we call the gifts of the Spirit are in fact the gifts of Christ to his church, gifts poured out in his ascended triumph. The giving of the gifts required the whole work of the Cross, and the gifts are given to bring the creation under the Lordship of the crucified and risen Jesus Christ. Christ gives these gifts to the church through the Spirit (1Cor.

12:8). Because it is Christ who is prime mover in this distribution, we are very aware that it is not man. The proper exercise of gifts is in the power of the Spirit, in Christ. 1Cor. 12:11 says of the gifts:

‘11 All these are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.’

That is, the Spirit is the one who operates the gifts; they are manifestations of the Spirit (1Cor. 12:7). Just as the grace of God cannot be separated from God, so the gifts are true only in fellowship with, and through abiding in, Christ.

‘4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; 5 and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; 6 and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one. 7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.’

We must not trivialise that statement that these manifestations of the Spirit are given ‘for the common good.’ The word here is also the word used in Matt. 5:29, 18:6 and 19:10 for ‘expedient’, used in the context of the avoiding of eternal judgment. In John 11:50 the high priest says that it is ‘for the common good’ that one man should die for the people, speaking prophetically of the death of Christ for the nation (and the world.) In John 16:7 Jesus says it is ‘for the common good’ for him to go away, that the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit might come. And in Hebrews 12:10 the Lord is compared to earthly fathers in regard to discipline: ‘he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness.’ In other words, all this points to the fact that the common good is related to the growth and maturity of God’s people in the matters of salvation and grace. The gifts are all the workings of God’s grace.

‘If we can grasp this principle, namely that in gifts, ministries and operations the grace of the Godhead is operative, then it will reduce the nonsense and pride which often accompanies these three things. In any case, 1Corinthians 13:1-3 is given to show that no gifts, ministries, or operations have any value apart from love. Apparently man can make them ‘manifestations of man’ and so render them valueless.’

Given all this, we must never devalue the gifts, workings and ministries that come to us through the grace of God. For the purpose of declaring the grace of God until all grace comes to its great and glorious goal, the many gifts given to the church are needed. We are to desire the gifts, especially the higher gifts, prophecy (the immediate declaration of God’s word in the testimony of Jesus) best of all. Paul instructed Timothy to stir upon the gift that was in him through the laying on of Paul’s hand (2Tim. 1:6-7). In 1Tim. 4:14 he is told there not to neglect the gift given through the prophetic utterance which came at the laying on of hands by the elders. The gifts are given as handmaids to the grace of God. We are to receive them from God and to use them wisely and graciously.

22. The Grace Of God And Humble Service

'3 For by the grace given to me I bid every one among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith which God has assigned him.' (Romans 12:3)

In context here in Romans Paul goes on to speak of the different ministry gifts which the Lord Jesus in his grace has bestowed on the church (12:4-8). By prefacing this discussion of ministry with this exhortation Paul shows us that it is in the grace of God that the true humility which is necessary for all true ministry/service is found. As soon as we start to think more highly of ourselves than we ought, the central heart of ministry is taken away, and what masquerades as ministry in fact becomes self-service, selfishness and leads not to the building up of the body but rather to its division and harm. Wherever there is pride in the body of Christ, then two things are certain: (i) the grace of God which saves sinners has been effectively forgotten about personally (even though it may be talked about); and (ii) there is an inability to truly assess the life of the people of God in ministry.

The Greek word for ministry is diakonia, and a diakonos was a servant. An alternative word is doulos which had the more specific meaning of 'slave' - these two words are almost interchangeable in the New Testament. (See e.g. 2Cor. 4 where diakonia in v. 1 is linked with the doulos in v. 4.) Such a term shows us that the focus in ministry is not on the doer, but rather on the recipient of the service (who has commanded it.) In Luke 17:1-4, Jesus gave clear instructions to the disciples on the necessity of living in ongoing forgiveness to our brothers in Christ. The disciples heard this and said (17:5), 'Increase our faith!' The word there implies that they believe such a command could only be accomplished by the super-human, the spiritual bionic man or woman! Jesus shows them that only a tiny amount of faith can accomplish great things (17:6), and then told them this parable:

'7 Will any one of you, who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep, say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come at once and sit down at table'? 8 Will he not rather say to him, 'Prepare supper for me, and gird yourself and serve me, till I eat and drink; and afterward you shall eat and drink'? 9 Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded? 10 So you also, when you have done all that is commanded you, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.' (Luke 17:7-10).

The fulfilling of ministry is not a badge of merit, a source of brownie points in the kingdom; any obedience only has value in the fact of the command which gave it. It is being constantly in mindfulness of the grace of God which is the source of ministry which saves us from pride in this regard. It is the person who knows the grace of God who is truly humble, serving without being servile.

All this is so because in receiving the grace of God, we receive the service of God. The grace of God takes us into the heart of God who serves, and catches us up into this same action. Jesus taught this:

'35 And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him, and said to him, 'Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.' 36 And he said to them, 'What do you want me to do for you?' 37 And they said to him, 'Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.' 38 But Jesus said to them, 'You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?' 39 And they said to him, 'We are able.' And Jesus said to them,

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‘The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; 40 but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.’ 41 And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John. 42 And Jesus called them to him and said to them, ‘You know that those who are supposed to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. 43 But it shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. 45 For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.’ (Mark 10:35-45)

James and John came to ask this question of Jesus immediately after he had spoken for the third time of the necessity of the arrest, suffering, death and resurrection which awaited him in Jerusalem (Mark 10:32-34). They heard what Jesus was speaking of, but clearly did not want any part of that - except the resurrection glory! Jesus showed them that the coming of that glory was through a time of great suffering - the drinking of the cup of suffering, the baptism of fire at the Cross. The two disciples in their pride foolishly think that they are up to such a task. By the grace that is established at the cross they will then be able to participate in the suffering, but only because of the grace at the Cross. Those who were at Jesus’ right and left hand were the two robbers or criminals (‘27 And with him they crucified two robbers, one on his right and one on his left. 28 And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘He was reckoned with the transgressors.’ (Mark 15:27-28)). This was the place of Christ’s coming to serve us in the giving of his life as a ransom for many. We must know that we are numbered among the transgressors for whom Christ died and so receive his service before we can be a servant/minister of grace.

Paul knew this thoroughly. He knew that by human standards he outshone his peers - see 2Cor. 11:21b-23(-29), Gal. 1:13-14, Acts 22:3-5; 26:4-11, and especially Philp. 3:3-7. Yet he knew that this counted for nothing; what counted was the grace of God and nothing else. It was by God’s grace that he had ministry.

‘7 But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8 Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ.’ (Philippians 3:7-8)

‘9 For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God which is with me.’ (1Corinthians 15:9-10)

‘12 I thank him who has given me strength for this, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful by appointing me to his service, 13 though I formerly blasphemed and persecuted and insulted him; but I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, 14 and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. 15 The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. And I am the foremost of sinners; 16 but I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience for an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. 17 To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.’ (1Timothy 1:12-17)

Note that the grace given which issues in a participation in Christ’s service in ministry is strongly motivating and energising. Paul ‘worked harder than all of them’; he urged both Timothy (2Tim. 4:5) and Archippus (Col. 4:17) to fulfill their ministries and was clear that he had fulfilled the ministry given to him by the Lord (Rom. 15:15-21, esp. v. 19). What constrained Paul was the grace of God - that great grace which had gripped him, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, meant that he was under an obligation to declare it, but the obligation was of love and freedom and joy.

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'16 For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! 17 For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward; but if not of my own will, I am entrusted with a commission. 18 What then is my reward? Just this: that in my preaching I may make the gospel free of charge, not making full use of my right in the gospel. 19 For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more. 20 To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews; to those under the law I became as one under the law - though not being myself under the law - that I might win those under the law. 21 To those outside the law I became as one outside the law - not being without law toward God but under the law of Christ - that I might win those outside the law. 22 To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. 23 I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.' (1 Corinthians 9:16-23)

23. The Grace Of God And Obedience

Christ's statement 'All authority is given to me (Matt. 28:18) is linked with the command to proclaim the Gospel and make disciples. The taking of the Gospel of grace to all the world is linked to the fact of Christ's Lordship. Christ's words are equivalent to saying, 'The Father has given all things into the hands of the Son (see John 3:35, 5:19-28, Matt. 11:27).' This means that there is no authority not under Christ's authority; He is Lord of all.

All authority comes from God and the purpose of all authority is ultimately the purpose of God for His creation. True authority is never really about maintaining the status quo, but rather about dynamic participation in God's outworking of His plan for creation. What matters most, over anything else in all the world, is the will of God and its accomplishment. (Hence we pray first of all in the prayer pattern given us by the Lord for the hallowing of God's name, the coming of His Kingdom and doing of His will.) As we have seen His purposes are the purposes of grace, determined before the world was founded, that He would have a holy, blameless and beloved family in His sight through His Son (see Eph. 1:3-10.)

'3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, 4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. 5 He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace 8 which he lavished upon us. 9 For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ 10 as a plan for the fulness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.'

Knowing the plan and purposes of God is essential for any who desire to live under His authority - i.e. to be obedient. Obedience is longing to know the will of God and, once knowing it, longing (actively) to do it. The true operation of this obedience is total - a partial obedience is only an obedience of convenience, which is no obedience at all, no submission of one will to another. The marks of total obedience are the fruit of the Spirit. Jesus alone is the man who offered total obedience to the Father.

Had there been no rebellion against authority by Satan and his hosts (see Rev. 12:1ff) and then a joining of that rebellion by Man (Gen. 3:1-6) then law and authority would only have been seen as the operation of God's love. All would have desire at all times to obey. Guilt alters the true view of authority and law, and so of obedience. Firstly guilt breeds anger which issues in disobedience and then this breeds guilt. All sorts of rationalisations against obedience arise, even cases against obedience to God, in order to justify disobedience, but this creates a compounding mix of guilt, anger, failure, bitterness. This is compounded even more by the fact that the law of God is written on the heart (Rom. 2:14-15) and all know that the refusal to do God's will is death (Rom. 1:32). Paul finally describes this in Romans 8:5-8 this way:

'5 For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. 6 To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. 7 For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, indeed it cannot; 8 and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.'

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Earlier in Romans 6:16 he speaks of the slavery that sin brings us into. (It is important to know that no person is finally free from obedience to something, even if as sons of disobedience they must obey the father of disobedience, Satan.) He says:

‘16 Do you not know that if you yield yourselves to any one as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?’

The grace of God is the only way to obedience and life in true authority, and so life in true liberty and glory in the Spirit. In the grace action of God in His Son, Christ established a new humanity for us to walk in - a humanity of utter obedience. In this obedience of his, he did the Father’s will by bearing the sins of the world, becoming them and enduring the wrath due them. It was the Father’s will to bruise him and to put him to grief, and Christ did His will. This obedience has brought grace sufficient for the whole world, and more than sufficient. Faith in Christ is itself very often called ‘obedience’ in the New Testament: see John 3:36, 6:28-29; Rom. 1:5, 15:18, 16:26; 2Cor. 9:13; Heb. 5:19; 1Pet. 1:2,22, 4:17. But faith issues in a life of obedience. Those who receive this grace by faith are reconciled to God, and so become subject to Him. Romans 8:1-4, 12-17 spells this out:

‘1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death. 3 For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, 4 in order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.... 12 So then, brethren, we¹ are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh - 13 for if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body you will live. 14 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. 15 For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” 16 it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.’

24. The Grace Of God And His Worship

The thing that typifies the age to come is the worship of heaven. Every glimpse into eternity that the Revelation of John provides us with is a glimpse of eternal worship. It would be fair to say that the goal of grace is universal worship. Since Eden was the sanctuary of God where He dwelt and the Man and Woman worshipped Him, and this sanctuary was destined to fill the earth, then the goal of creation was universal worship.

12 'Woe to him who builds a town with blood, and founds a city on iniquity! 13 Behold, is it not from the LORD of hosts that peoples labor only for fire, and nations weary themselves for nought? 14 For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.' (Habakkuk 2:12-14)

To worship something or someone is to give worth to it/him/her. Whatever exists, we give some value or worth to, and this is the measure of our worship of it. Worship also involves us in service - the two words are synonymous in the Old and New Testaments. This giving of honour and service rebounds then on the worshipper - the object of worship shares itself, its being and glory, with the worshipper. There is always a communion between worshipper and the one worshipped. At creation, the Lord gave a form of worship to the creation in his valuing of things as good and finally very good. Adam gave worship to Eve in his words, 'This at last is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh!' Together the Man and Woman walked with God in the cool of the evening, and this must have been a time of very rich worship. It must have been a sweet communion between them.

The Fall was at heart a refusal to worship God and to give Him thanks:

21 '...for although they knew God they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles. 24 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, 25 because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever! Amen.' (Romans 1:21-25)

Ironically it is the refusal to worship that helps us understand what worship involved -

- (i) the honouring of God, i.e. the giving to Him His due glory
- (ii) the thanking of God
- (iii) serving Him as creatures of the Creator

The refusal to worship God led to guilt, shame, pollution (the sharing of the being of idols with the worshippers) - but this refusal could not do away with the drive to worship, which always remains a compulsive drive in man. If he will not worship God, he must worship gods, even inventing them or giving a kind of deity to created things. Such worship is then enslaving, involving man in servitude to the demons who always stand behind the idols, getting their power over human beings through the dynamic of false worship (see 1Cor. 10:14-21.)

Since the Fall is universal, then each of us is caught up into false worship with the shame it gives in return. Only saving grace can create worshippers. In fact it is grace which creates the faithful people who exercise themselves in worship. The Old Testament constantly points to the prior grace of God drawing out the praise of His people.

In John 4:21-24, Jesus said to the woman at the well,

20 "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. 22 You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23 But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him. 24 God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

He shows in that statement that grace and worship are linked - the Jews had true worship for they knew the salvation of God. Until Jesus came, salvation was only in Israel and true worship was only in Israel's temple at Jerusalem. Jesus however speaks here of a radical change - a new, universal worship which could not be located in any city or place, which would be of a new order - in spirit and in truth - and which would be initiated by the Father, showing thus that those who worship truly are His children.

In the coming of Christ this new worship had broken out. The grace of the Lord Jesus created the new worship. Wherever the signs of his grace were performed, there was a response of praise. Those who came to know the forgiveness of their sins loved him much and worshipped him. Even at the cross, the grace of Christ broke through to the thief who thus honoured him as king and so adored him. The centurion too recognised the truth of Jesus' righteousness and honoured him. As ascended Lord Jesus poured out the Spirit and the first mark in the people of the receipt of the Spirit was that they worshipped, telling out the mighty works of God. Romans 1 reversed! And with this inflow of worship by grace, we have a foretaste of heaven.

It is a question of some perplexity as to how the church gets itself into such moribund states and into such a low ebb of worship. How could the redeemed person fail to adore the God of grace? He or she who receives the grace of God will worship God. Where worship has fallen to low states, then undoubtedly the appreciation of the grace of God has fallen to low states. At any time the church becomes proud, self-satisfied, or in any way focussed on itself, worship will dry up, even if what passes as worship is at a human level vibrant, electric, dignified, serene or beautiful.

Such worship is not, of course, limited to the gathered congregation under the preaching of the Word, but relates to the whole of the life of the community - for worship is service. Whatever we do as persons is to be offered in worship. There will not be one action of our lives which is not worship, albeit it may be deficient, wrong or false worship sometimes. There is no time lag between receiving the grace of God and serving, although there may be growth in maturity in service.

This whole-personed worship is the highest glory a person can know. For in worship, God communicates Himself to us and we are caught up into union with Him. This can come no other way. Our glory is given to us as we give glory to God in worship. Moses stood in His presence and worshipped, and his face shone with the glory that he beheld. Even more, in the grace of our Lord Jesus, we are with open faces beholding the glory of the Lord and so are being changed from one degree of glory to another. All this is from the Lord who is the Spirit.

25. Witnessing To And By The Grace Of God In His World

The word 'witness' (also 'testify') is a word we know well in legal matters these days. To bear witness or to testify is to speak in a court of law (i.e. in a place where there is some dispute about the truth) and to present matters as you know, and have seen, them to be. Only a person with some experience or involvement in the matter can give testimony. At the beginning of John's first letter, the apostle writes:

'1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life - 2 the life was made manifest, and we saw it, and testify to it, and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us - 3 that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. 4 And we are writing this that our joy may be complete. 5 This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him is no darkness at all.' (1John 1:1-5).

John is concerned to make clear here that he is speaking of that which he knows - he heard Christ, he saw him, he looked upon him and touched him. This refers primarily to the encounter that John and the disciples had with Jesus Christ after his resurrection. In meeting Christ risen from the dead, the disciples had brought home to them the reality and truth of God's grace. He said, 'Peace be with you' and showed them his hands and his side (John 20:20.) It was this that assured them of his saving grace. And on this basis he commissioned them, sending them as the Father had sent him, but calling them to wait for the empowering gift of the Holy Spirit for this great work. There would be no witness without the Holy Spirit.

The truth of God is contested and contradicted every day by sinful human beings. In fact, Romans 1:18, 25 shows clearly that, in sin, men and women prefer the lie to the truth and suppress the truth through wickedness. Of the things that Jesus said that come out of the heart, defiling a person, false witness is amongst them (Matt. 15:19.) (History is the continual witness to the lie that man has devised to suppress the truth of God and its fruit. It is the lie of human autonomy, the lie of self-preservation, self-justification, and self-progress. And history shows the unhappy and tragic fruit that this lie has brought, where men and women live without peace, joy or love.) To maintain this lie, a false witness has to arise, a declaration of a false truth, especially where the truth of God is clearly breaking forth in proclamation. We see this very clearly in the Gospels with the number of times that those who rejected Christ went out of their way to find false witnesses either against him or against his disciples. (See esp. Mark 14:55-59, cf. Matt. 26:59.)

It is only by the grace of God that a person ever perceives the truth - it is the revelatory work of the Holy Spirit. When the truth breaks open a person's heart, we know that God Himself has been at work in His grace. For this reason, it is absolutely necessary for us, as witnesses to the grace and truth of God, to be living in the immediate reality and power of His grace and to be filled with the Holy Spirit. It is not enough to have had an experience of God's grace in the past; what we knew of grace in the past must be a living and dynamic reality to us now for our witness to be effective and powerful. Grace can only be communicated by those who know their utter dependency upon God for His grace. Thus, the necessity for the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

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Also we see that to bear witness also puts us into the arena of conflict. Maybe this is why so many will not actively witness to the love and truth of God in Christ - for it will always involve us in suffering. For this reason too we see that we need the fulness of grace to remain in the truth in our relationships as we meet suffering. Only the person of grace will not withdraw and become self-protective or else be aggressive and retaliate in the face of opposition. In 2Corinthians 4:7-15 we see even more that this suffering actually strengthens us in grace, and so grace extends to more and more:

'7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us. 8 We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; 10 always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. 11 For while we live we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh. 12 So death is at work in us, but life in you. 13 Since we have the same spirit of faith as he had who wrote, "I believed, and so I spoke," we too believe, and so we speak, 14 knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. 15 For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.'

The truth is that being involved in Gospel proclamation and its attendant suffering is the very thing that sustains and strengthens us in the Gospel that we proclaim. For as we witness to the grace we know and to the Father of grace, His Son and the Spirit, they dwell in us and so we grow and are strengthened in them.

26. The Grace Of God And Healing

We have seen time again in this series that the goal of God's action of grace in His Son Jesus Christ is the healing and renewing of all things:

'3 ...and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; 4 he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away." 5 And he who sat upon the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.'" (Rev. 21:3-5)

'1 Then he showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb 2 through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. 3 There shall no more be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and his servants shall worship him; 4 they shall see his face, and his name shall be on their foreheads. 5 And night shall be no more; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they shall reign for ever and ever. 6 And he said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place.'" (Rev. 22:1-6)

This healing is not simply the restoration of things to their original state, but rather the bringing of them into full and resplendent glory, glory destined for them before the beginning of time. It is a healing to be brought to this goal, not simply a maturing, because sin, death and the devil had in fact diverted creation from the course of glory set for it by the Father.

The public ministry of Jesus in the Gospels is full of occasions of healing. In fact, right at the start of his public ministry, Jesus read from the scroll of Isaiah:

'18 The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, 19 to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.'" (Luke 4:18-19)

This good news Jesus came to announce undoubtedly held the promise of healing, and Peter later summed up that ministry in the words, 'God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power... he went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him (Acts 10:38)' These healings were signs of his "Messiahship", of the fact that where he was the Kingdom of God was at work in grace. He made clear to those who would listen that the healings were actions of the kingdom (e.g. Matt. 12:28), and he commissioned the disciples to have similar ministry (see Luke 10:9).

The healings were not ends in themselves - they were entry points into the rich grace of God for sinners. His healing ministry indicated that he could do something about the causal basis of sickness. It is clear that Jesus did not think that all human sickness was caused by sin - see John 9. Some sickness is due to the sins of others (as the question of the scribes in this chapter implies, and as the death of David and Bathsheba's first son makes clear). Some sickness is simply because we live in a world in disorder due to sin's effects. Yet, there were at times clear links between sin and sickness. So, the man at the pool of Bethzatha (John 5) was told, following his healing, to not sin any more, lest something worse befall him. Likewise in Matt.

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9:1-8, the healing of the paralysed man clearly connected forgiveness and healing. The audience were forced to accept that Jesus had power to forgive because the man was healed.

Some say all sickness comes from the evil one and all health comes from God. This can be a highly dangerous view. In fact, God says of Himself in the Scriptures that it is He who puts to death and brings to life, who wounds and heals (Deut. 32:39). There is no god beside Him, and none can deliver out of His hand. That is, all sickness and health is under God's hand directly, and even where evil forces may be operative this is under His control. This wounding and healing of God are part of His covenant action towards the creation, action which comes to ensure that we live in the fulness of His grace. Had there been no fall and so sin and death had not entered the world, then sickness would be unknown. The wounding and healing are the actions of judgment and grace. We must see how wonderful, how extraordinary, how exquisitely rich is the fact that God actually moves out in grace to heal.

In the ultimate, all will be healed. Those who refuse the grace of God, and its healing balm, here are of course excluded from that final healing there. Such a view of God acting in His grace purposefully and sovereignly will stop us from being obsessed with having everything perfect in 'the now.' Until the coming of Christ, Christian men and women will continue to get sick and frail, and die. Faith in God the Healer will always have the ultimate healing of all things as the primary focus. Exercising such faith and living in the grace of God, a person, is free, even in the midst of great difficulties. The forgiven, purified, justified, sanctified person has been delivered from fear of death and judgment and from the terrible effects of sin, and from the tyranny of evil powers. It is life in the love of God. This is all known now by faith. And it is the state of true health - and nothing can separate us from it, not even sickness or death.