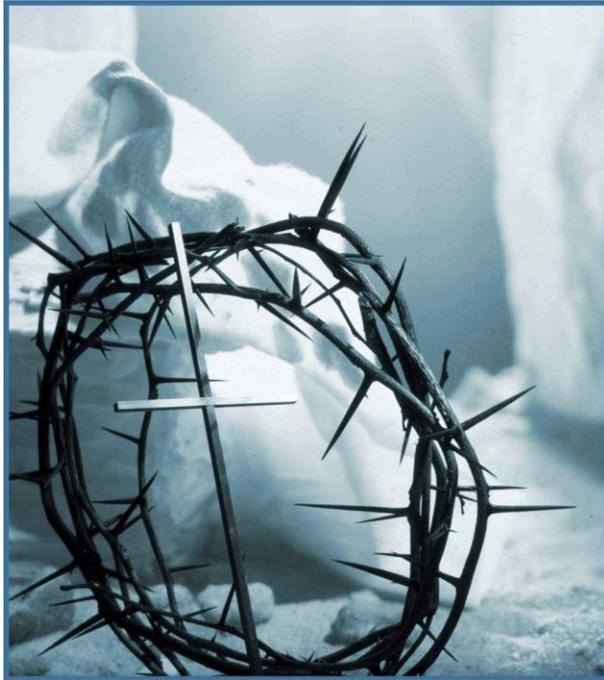


The King Eternal



By Jeremy Lucas

*"Now unto **the King eternal**, immortal, invisible, the only wise God,
be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen." I Timothy 1:17*

First Grace Church of Plantation
"Real Answers for Real Life"
Plantation, Florida

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"Grace Rightly Applied Changes Everything"

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AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

Among the many mysteries of Scripture, one that I have come to admire is found in the desert wanderings of Hagar and Ishmael (Genesis 21). Abraham provided them with a single bottle of water for the journey, but as anyone would expect, the flask was soon empty from the heat of the sun and the needs of a child. Leaving Ishmael a good distance away, Hagar weeps before the Lord as though this is the end of her son's life because she cannot provide him with anything to drink. Every understandable fear overcame this mother until we read that God "opened her eyes and she saw a well of water." For years, I have been compelled to ask Bible students and teachers the most unlikely question of this passage. By opening her eyes, did God supernaturally put a well in front of her that was never there before or had the well always been there and she was simply unable to see it?

For some, this may seem as trivial as it is unconventional. For me, this is a question that digs deep into the heart of a knowledge only God can provide. How many of us have been reading through the same set of verses for years and out of the blue, we see something that we never saw before? Perhaps the Word changed since the last time we read it? Certainly not. Over and over, we are faced with studies that bring new light to previously chartered territory. And by design, it is God who opens our eyes to see the Living Word.

At the forefront of this introduction, I must confess several convictions of my theology to those who are unsure. First and foremost, I am eternally saved by God's grace through faith in such a way that there is not, was not, nor will there ever be a way that I can work my way into His glory (Ephesians 2:8-9). Secondly, I am a Dispensationalist of the Mid-Acts view who believes that the Body of Christ and the present "dispensation of the grace of God" began through the unique revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ unto the Apostle Paul (Galatians 1:11-12; Ephesians 3:1-4). My studies are, therefore, guided by the learned principles of "right division" as taught in II Timothy 2:15. As well, I am a firm believer in the notion that teachers are accountable to the Biblical investigation of their listeners as illustrated by the Bereans of Acts 17:11. Thus, by writing this, I admit to being both a teacher and a student who is vulnerable to criticism and rightly so.

By no measure do I suppose that everyone reading these pages will agree with me on each of the above points, but they are important for my target audience. Books and studies such as this have been published for many years by many authors for many audiences. Hence, I do not pretend that the content of this book will be any more profound or enlightening than those who have gone before me. However, those to whom I have most shared fellowship over the past ten years have had nothing of this sort written for them.

These men and women, known within their own circles as "grace believers" and labeled on the outside as "hyper-dispensationalists," have become some of my closest and most treasured friends in the Lord. Yet for all of the studies, the charts, the discussions and the debates, far too many of these beloved brothers and sisters have been sapped of their joy in Christ to the point that "grace" is no longer grace and "truth" is no longer truth. Songs of life are voiced with sorrow and words of hope are shared in secret. The Almighty God is stuffed into a box while His Word becomes a source for our intellectual competitions and human reason. To those on the outside, we look to have the wisdom of fools. To those on the inside, we foolishly think ourselves wise.

Throughout the course of my many conversations with such Biblically-driven men and women of God, I have encountered an odd and unexplained phenomenon. While we hold up the grace of God according to His Word, many have now defined God according to their theology. In other words, the capacity of God to do or not do, to be or not be, to operate or not operate, is no longer explained by Scripture, but by a fear of the unknown.

We cannot be content to know the grace that God provides without knowing the God who provides it. Teachers of such a precious gospel ought to know the One that they patiently await. And much to the frustration of those who often place our great Savior in the back seat of their theology, His hands are not to be tied unless He Himself ties them. We serve a living, true, and faithful God who wants to be known throughout all of His creation. By grace, we are able to know Him with a depth of understanding beyond the rocks and the mountains that also anticipate His arrival.

Although I have poured out my heart through the pages of this book, neither my emotions nor my convictions should ever dictate whether or not you believe God is all that He is. For that reason, this book is not merely sprinkled with Scripture, but doused in it. Who among us can give an accurate description of God if all of our understanding is based on shifting sand and human experience? Hardly a man would dare to try if he admitted just how often his own discretion and his own judgment is impaired by humanity. Alas, the true story of God is not found in how we feel, but in what the Lord God testifies of Himself.

As you turn each page, my hope and prayer is that your eyes will be opened to the Word, that you may see things that you never saw before, and that you may come face to face with a greater knowledge of our glorious God and Savior, the King eternal.

Jeremy Lucas

Founder and Administrator of G.R.A.C.E. Ministries

PART ONE



THE RICHES OF HIS GLORY
(Ephesians 3:14-16)

BEFORE THE THRONE

Curious little children often find themselves peaking from behind a doorway where daddy is working on a project. With a toddler's cough, a sweet smile, or a gentle whisper, they come nearer to the chair where their father sits. Unsure whether their presence is accepted, they try to reach out and touch his knee. Sweeping around to scoop the child in his arms, a most patient father takes no caution in assuring this loved one that no matter the time, no matter the day or night, they are welcome to enter in and share in his company. And so the child, finding comfort in this embrace, asks the most innocent question of curiosity. "What are you working on, daddy?"

When the Lord opens up His Word to students like you and I, there is astonishing truth found in each page that surpasses the most accurate textbook, the most intricate algebra, or the most creative epic. At the moment we place our faith in the finished work of Christ Jesus, our decisions and thoughts begin to mature. Knowing from the beginning that we are loved, our own innocent questions arise. What does Scripture teach me about me? How should I handle this situation in my life? What did Paul do? What did David do? What did Jesus do?

Others ask a completely different set of questions. What does this word mean? Why did this get written? What audience is this written to? Where and how do these letters fit into that story? When did this happen in relation to that?

Whether we approach the Word of God for practical or academic purposes, truth is found in both. What we miss, however, is the question that seems to evade even the most faithful student. While searching to understand the audience, the application, the characters, the meaning, and the connected dots, the Divine Author stands ignored.

To whom do we give glory? As our fingers pass from page to page of His Word, it's easy to get lost in the details or the grand purpose. Much of the risk involved with attempting to "know God" is a human dilemma of feeling both unworthy and incapable of describing Him. Fortunately for all of us, He has gone the distance to describe Himself and we have only to give Him our attention.

Together, we're going to hike up a mountainside of God's glory and look out over the vastness of who He is. While it is true that we are some of the main characters, this climb is not about us. This is about our Father telling us who He is, what He has done, and what He is doing.

A tremendous amount of attention will be placed on God's descriptive features and the words that we often take for granted. We all use words to communicate as they are essential to our language. It would be horribly unfortunate, however, if we found ourselves using words without any knowledge of their meaning. More troubling would be if we began talking *about* God apart from the depths of Scripture.

"Job hath spoken without knowledge and his words [were] without wisdom." **Job 34:35**

"Therefore doth Job open his mouth in vain; he multiplieth words without knowledge." **Job 35:16**

Lodged on many bookshelves are titles that often give an illusion that one will "find God" or "experience God" through very human descriptions. Several years ago, during the height of movie mania, I encountered a book with the title, Finding God in the Lord of the Rings. Finding Him in what? Do we find our Creator in the fictional tales of wizards and elves? Many of you probably joined with me to applaud the success of LOTR during the Academy Awards, but the justification for many Christians was a notion that they could "find God" in something man-made.

This, my friends, comes from the reality that we all speak and we all communicate with words. We tell stories and we adore epics. Each thing that we write and each thing that we say is made up of many words. During this very human process, we often attempt to describe God without trusting the autobiography that He finished writing 2,000 years ago.

"And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness [was] upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, let there be light, and there was light."
Genesis 1:2-3

In the beginning, God moved over the surface of the deep. Depth existed before it had a face to move across. With just four words, God commanded light to come out of darkness and the deep lost its ability to hide. We often glide across the Scriptures knowing that there is "depth" below each page and each word, but we hesitate to recognize that the Word itself **is** our light to understand the deep.

"That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what [is] the breadth, and length, and depth, and height;"
Ephesians 3:17-18

"But God hath revealed [them] unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God." **I Corinthians 2:10**

We search the depths of God by looking at the words He has given us to study and trust. The Scriptures are full of words that we have heard all of our lives as well as words that we've never quite been able to define. Throughout its history, the modern English tongue has proved an ever-evolving collection of words that we've taken from other languages to give them our own sound, our own meaning, and usually our own spelling. Latin gave us very early words like *cyse*, *catte*, *weall*, and *straet*, which are respectively now known as cheese, cat, wall, and street. Some are easy to recognize and others are difficult to catch without assistance. At the same time, meanings themselves have changed in unexpected ways.

"He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye." **Deuteronomy 32:10**

To be the *apple* of one's eye isn't quite as commonly used today, but it certainly stood out several years ago when referring to someone who might be considered the most special. We would be correct to say that the phrase hasn't changed since it was first translated, but few of us have ever noticed or considered that "apple" was the Old English word for the "*pupil* of the eye." If you try saying "apple" and then "pupil," you might quickly see the resemblance and consider the way in which both spelling and understanding has changed.¹ We tend to cherish and protect the most central part of our eyes because it is the pupil that is essential for sight. When a newly English-speaking individual shows up to hear us refer to the "apple of our eye," it would be easy to see their expression of confusion trying to imagine a fruit that has lodged itself in just one eye.

For this reason, you'll find yourself reading a bit of *etymology* throughout the course of our study together. Etymology is, in its most basic form, the "history of words." When Paul describes God as the only "Potentate" in I Timothy 6, how many of us know exactly what he means? With it being such an uncommon word in modern usage, we're left with just two choices. The first option is

that we simply move forward in our reading and never know. The second finds us pulling out the nearby dictionary or study tool so that we're prepared to give an answer if and when someone else asks the same question.

"Let your speech [be] always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man." **Colossians 4:6**

We all have a common speech depending on our language and questions are bound to come our direction from the smallest child to the eldest grandfather. Knowing how we are to answer is not an easy process and we won't always know what to say, but understanding the speech that we use as our source of communication is crucial.

That being said, a few of us have gathered to embark on the steep incline that awaits our entry. If you'd like to see what's at the top, it would be a privilege for me to share that journey with you. The guidepost has told us where we're going, but there will be much to enjoy along the way. Join with me as we go to behold the King Eternal upon whom all honor and glory remains forever and ever.

TO EVERY SEED HIS OWN

Our path begins with an introduction of glory in all its simplicity. Without attempting to color it up with images of Civil War soldiers and Revolutionary heroes, the Scriptures alone answer our simple question: what is glory? After laying out our most trusted and beloved gospel of salvation in Christ Jesus, Paul asks a rhetorical and yet highly popular question being discussed in Corinth.

"But some [man] will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?"
I Corinthians 15:35

Reasonable questions, right? Not exactly. Instead of acknowledging a higher power that works in the dead and the living, they begin asking themselves whether a buried body will be raised with the decayed flesh that it once had. Choosing to answer his own rhetoric, Paul answers with the following:

"[Thou] fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die: And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other [grain]: But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body. All flesh [is] not the same flesh: but [there is] one [kind of] flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, [and] another of birds." **I Corinthians 15:36-39**

The illustration here is that of a seed which has no form of beauty because it is only a seed. Not until that seed is dead (or rather, put into the ground as though it were dead) can it become something else much more grand than what it was originally. To be quickened is to be made alive. If a seed is sown, it cannot find a greater form until it first dies. In other words, the seed sowing process becomes a "type" of the resurrection. By no means will that seed be brought to life as a seed again. Instead, to every seed its own new body will be given as the Lord pleases.

Continuing this line of thought, we find ourselves reminded that there are many creations and each has a different flesh, or body.

"[There are] also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial [is] one, and the [glory] of the terrestrial [is] another. [There is] one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for [one] star differeth from [another] star in glory. So also [is] the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power:" I Corinthians 15:40-43

A *celestial* body is of a heavenly form while a *terrestrial* body is of an earthly form (through which we find common use of the phrase, "marking one's *territory*"). Both heavenly and earthly bodies have a certain glory attached to them. If we're speaking of men, beasts, fish, or birds (earthly), they all have their own individual glory. If we're speaking of the sun, moon, and stars (heavenly), they also have their own individual glory. What then, is glory, if every part of creation has its own?

Imagine for a moment that you've chosen to host an event for friends or family members in your home. In preparation for this dinner party, you take extra time cleaning and pay careful attention to detail so that you'll be proud to open the doors when guests arrive. Every picture frame is tilted to the best position and each finger swipe of dust is removed for fear that someone may think that the place they're in has been "lived in." Essentially, what you've now set up is the perfect house. Then you open the door and randomness begins.

Children come rushing in to visit with other children and run from one room to the next. Drinks are poured and full cups are set on counters that were once wiped dry. Discussions and fellowship may well be enriching, but your home naturally digresses from its most "perfect" state. To a degree, your house has descended from what was "good" into what is now dirty and unclean. Anything, be it a home, a car, a computer, or even a world that is left to its own purpose will gradually shift from its most exalted state to its own shame. That original state, a most exalted position, is what we refer to as "glory."

Each part of creation has its "most exalted state" and such is the case with us as human beings. The trouble is, we did not begin with glory... we are resurrected *to* glory. We must, therefore, be sown (buried) in our corruption, dishonor, and weakness in order to find ourselves raised in immortality, glory, and power.

This, my friends, is why we speak of glory as an explanation of majesty or splendor. There is nothing higher than one's own glory for that is their "most exalted state." A king will be spoken of as "coming in all his glory" for there is no one more powerful than he among the people. Yet, for all their glory as king, it is merely the title (not the man) that presses forward when they meet the grave. Even then, nations of kings eventually fall to the kings of nations and a downward spiral sends the most powerful country into its own whirlwind of decay and destruction (if it doesn't decay from within). Thus, the glory of a nation faces a corruption leading to death just as birds, beasts, fish, or men. No greater glory can exist, in this understanding, than a glory that does not face corruption, that does not decay, and one that does not have an end.

DECLARATION OF GLORY

Moses met with God on a mountaintop. David issued praises to God through his own voice and many instruments during a time of war. Job engaged the Lord God through a tense and often amazing discussion. Peter walked to Jesus on the water and witnessed his tenderhearted patience. Each of these men went on to write as the Lord inspired. And each one of these men had their own unique relationship with the Creator. Who better to describe God than those who witnessed His

presence in their midst? For it is through their descriptions in His Word that we have any ability at all to know Him.

One such man, I've come to believe, is a most neglected character of Scripture for the sole reason that his story comes after a greater one. Bible readers find it easy to adore the life of Christ because He is, without second thought, the Savior of all. Thus, when He departs into the cloud of Acts 1:9, many find themselves believing this is the end of the story and all such additional writings are, in many ways, "lesser" passages of Scripture just reflecting what was and will be. But it is the story that comes soon after that I'd like us to focus. Only after Christ's departure do we soon meet a man unto whom Christ appears in his "most exalted state."

Our first introduction to this man comes at the end of a lengthy sermon by Stephen, a witness who took his opportunity in chains to speak about the failure of Israel and their rejection of Christ Jesus. At the close of his message, we find this:

*"When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with [their] teeth. But he (Stephen), being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, and said, 'Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.'" **Acts 7:54-56***

Stephen sees the "glory of God" just as he is about to pay the highest price with his life. When he announces what he has just seen, they cry out.

*"Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, and cast [him] out of the city, and stoned [him]: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul." **Acts 7:57-58***

This, the future apostle unto the Gentiles and steward of the age of grace, first appears at the declaration of God's glory. Two chapters later, we find this:

*"And as he (Saul) journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shone round about him a light from heaven: and he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, 'Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?' " **Acts 9:3-4***

A later account finds Paul sharing that this blindness was a result not just of a "light from heaven," but even more specific.

*"And when I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus." **Acts 22:11***

As a man who would eventually write more than half of what we now call our New Testament, it's important to note that his earliest encounter with the Lord began at a declaration and display of God's glory. For this reason, I've chosen to make the Apostle Paul our tourguide to the top of the mountain. While we could easily venture into Solomon's wisdom or David's adoration, this particular path will begin and end with a man who spoke of no one greater than the Father of glory.

*"That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him:" **Ephesians 1:17***

ONE GOD

On Sunday, August 19, 2007, Sheila Drummond recorded what is "believed to be the first hole-in-one by a totally blind female golfer" in the history of the sport. The article noting this accomplishment was titled, *Blind Woman Makes History with Ace*.² The ace in golf, of course, means that one stroke was all it took to put a little ball into a little hole some 100 plus yards away. Rare as it is, golf lovers understand terms like "ace" just as card players recognize what it means to have "an ace in the hole."

"For [there is] one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ;"

I Timothy 2:5

Throughout the course of history, words have grown with the languages that adopt them. Underlined above is a most basic and familiar word that we find in the New Testament almost 300 times. "One" or "only" comes from the Greek cardinal number *eis*. Believe it or not, *eis* is pronounced *āce* and is source for our modern *ace*. In many cases, we use it when we're talking about someone who is the best at what they do. In other words, if someone is "#1," then they are an ace.³

Certainly it could be said that understanding *eis* is a rather insignificant detail in the grand scheme of things, but let's bear in mind the period and audience that Paul is writing. Less than 30 years before Christ came into the world, an epic poem was written to give both Emperor Augustus and the Roman people a sense that they had descended from some one and some place of great reputation. This mythological story is known as the *Aeneid*. In it, readers find the gods, of whom each has their own purpose and task, working quite frequently against each other because of individually self-seeking hopes that they have for mankind. At moments when the hero (man) seems just about to achieve his seeming destiny, a frustrated god or goddess steps in to raise up armies against him. And so the story goes.

Roman and Greek mythology is based around a world where "the gods" affect every day life, no matter how ordinary or profound. One's only hope to live peaceably on the earth is to appease each god individually through sacrifices, worship, prayers, and required ceremonies. Taking a look at mythology, however, should not surprise you as a student of the Scriptures. Throughout Paul's journeys, we find him encountering some very fascinating experiences with those who fear these many gods.

*"And there sat a certain man at Lystra, impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother's womb, who never had walked: The same heard Paul speak: who steadfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed, said with a loud voice, 'Stand upright on thy feet.' And he leaped and walked. And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, 'The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men. And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker. Then the priest of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifices with the people. [Which] when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard [of], they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out, and saying, 'Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein.'" **Acts 14:8-15***

The story of the *Aeneid* places Jupiter as the highest of all gods. Greeks called him Zeus. At any time that Jupiter felt he needed to get a message down to someone on the earth, he would send Mercury, or Mercurius, as his messenger. To quote a passage from the epic, the following gives a fairly good rendition of how the Romans saw these two particular gods:

"So spoke Jupiter, and he sent down Mercury, the son of Maia, to make the lands and the citadel of the new city of Carthage hospitable to the Trojans, in case Dido, in her ignorance of destiny, should bar her country to them. Through the great expanse of air he (Mercury) flew, wielding his wings like oars, and soon alighted the shores of Libya. There he lost no time in carrying out the commands of Jupiter..."⁴

Various other gods in this epic take on the form and image of men or women that they believe will give them an advantage in persuasion. When the people in Lystra saw that our Apostle Paul had healed a cripple and that he was doing the majority of the speaking, they naturally assumed that the quiet and tall one, Barnabas, was Jupiter and that the speaker was his servant, Mercury. The apostles' response, of course, is one of disheartened weeping. They are not there in representation of two different gods, but are there in representation of "the living God." Similar problems arise several chapters later in Acts:

"Therefore disputed he (Paul) in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him. Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoics, encountered him. And some said, 'What will this babbling say?' other some, 'He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods:' because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection. And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, 'May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, [is]?'" **Acts 17:17-19**

Epicurus was a Greek philosopher who lived some 300+ years before Christ and taught that the highest good is one's own modest pleasure through virtue and friendships. Stoics, whose philosophy originated around the same time, believed that relational emotions were nothing more than a distraction that hindered proper learning and maturity. The two political ideals were pitted against each other throughout the area that Paul was engaging. In the marketplace, he was forced to address this belief that he was babbling on about some new and "strange gods."

Greeks were not, by any means, comfortable with the idea of embracing Roman gods any more than Romans were comfortable believing in Greek gods. Although they had similar parallels, the Greeks of Acts 17 took for granted that because Paul was a Roman and was speaking about Jesus as God, that he must be introducing yet another series of Roman gods. This opened the door for him to silence any question:

"Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, 'Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye too are superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you. God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed anything, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things;" **Acts 17:22-25**

Putting to rest any superstition that he is speaking about a multiple series of gods, Paul quite simply lays out the "God that made the world and all things therein." He displays the "ace in the hole" that listeners were unaware existed. While they were lost in the ignorance of their own worship practices, we find Paul pointing them to God, the "Lord of heaven and earth."

Additional Roman gods like Diana in Ephesus (Acts 19) are mentioned throughout the rest of the Acts period, but it's important to stop here and turn our attention forward. Gentile audiences were captivated by polytheistic religion. That is, a religion that worships many gods (Greek: *poly* = many; *theism* = god) in ignorance of "one" God who created all.

In addition to the word *eis* that we discovered earlier in I Timothy, another very familiar term shows up on several occasions.

"Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, [be] honor and glory forever and ever. Amen." **I Timothy 1:17**

Most of us throughout our lives have been required at some point to offer a monologue or a speech. Monologue builds from Gk.*monos*, which indicates more than just being "one." If any person must give a presentation without the assistance of another, then they are the "only" one giving it. In essence, they are alone.

I Timothy 1:17, as you'll find, is a key verse throughout this study because it packs so much within its borders of "now" to "amen." Here we focus our attention on the truth that "the King eternal, immortal, invisible," is the "only wise God." This term "only" is *monos*, which we have already become familiar. If He is the *monos* of anything, He is for lack of outside assistance. No one "assisted" or "helped" God become wise. He simply is on His own. Thus, all wisdom stems from God alone because God is one.

Look, for just a moment, a little more closely at the word "alone." Perhaps you see in it the key word we're dealing with in this section. And you would be correct to notice that it is made up of "all" and "one." It is, in fact, built from the contraction of understanding someone or something that has "all" in "one." Thus, if God is "alone," it is not that He is empty or void of something (as we often find ourselves believing when we use the term today). Rather, it is that He is "all in one."

"One God (eis) and Father of all, who [is] above all, and through all, and in you all." **Ephesians 4:6**

"For by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether [they be] thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist." **Colossians 1:16-17**

Putting these together allows us to see, first and foremost, that apart from any characteristics we can and will find in Him, He is one God by way of two descriptions. He is one because there is no other (eis). He is also one because He alone is all in one (monos).

"God and God alone
Created all these things we call our own
From the mighty to the small, the glory in them all
Is God's and God's alone"⁵

THE ULTIMATE DYNASTY

On January 28, 1990, John Elway lowered his head in defeat as the San Francisco 49ers tied one other NFL team in winning four Super Bowls. The Niners, who during that season had easily become my favorite team in pro football, fully dominated the game from start to finish without offering much room to breath for Elway's Broncos. This was a sweet taste of victory for a group that had spent most of the 1980s developing themselves as a rising dynasty in football. From Pittsburgh to Dallas and now in New England, the National Football League has seen each decade house a prominent group of men who everyone else wanted to beat.

Politics and world history have seen a similar rise and fall from age to age. The Roman Empire is often referred to as a dynasty. Likewise, the Persian or Greek Empires before Rome gained equal reputations. Also known as Kingdoms or Empires, these dynasties are what they are because they are seen as the final authority among the known world. Even if the king or queen dies, their title is passed on and the throne still holds as much power as before. Thus, a dynasty is the primary and sole power above all other authorities.

"And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship," Acts 8:27

Students familiar with the above passage may recall that this is the "Ethiopian Eunuch" whom Philip instructs in the Word of God. His authority comes from the Greek word, *dunastes*, from which we have *dynasty*. This man held great authority under the Queen of Ethiopia. But as we can see, his *dynasty* comes from someone other than himself.

"I give thee charge in the sight of God, who quickeneth all things, and [before] Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession; That thou keep [this] commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ: Which in his times he shall show, [who is] the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords;" I Timothy 6:13-15

Our earlier observation regarding "only" comes into play as we discover "Potentate" is also from *dunastes*. Hence, this phrase is read as *monos dunastes*, or, "the only dynasty."

To be more plain-spoken, a potentate is one who comes not only with the authority of the king, but as though he were the king himself. His authority is a given expectation among those who receive him because they accept that if he comes in, they have invited the king into their home or community. When God declares Himself the "only Potentate," He is declaring Himself as the only one with authority.

"Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me;" II Timothy 4:17a

This is built from the same root as we find for *dunastes*. Rather than dealing with authority itself, "strengthened" is *endynamoo*, which stems from *dynamoo*, meaning "to make strong." More than likely, you see a very close connection between *dynamoo* and the more familiar "dynamite" as found in English. You're certainly not barking up the wrong tree to begin noticing how similar the language is in many cases. Anyone who uses dynamite knows the strength that comes with it during an explosion. In II Timothy 4, Paul was in great need of strength when all human companions left him

by the wayside. The Lord stood with him and gave him strength as only a potentate, or rather, the "only Potentate" has the authority to do.

Beyond the authority and beyond the strength lies an even more recognizable feature with this only Potentate. In addition to authority and strength, the Potentate brings power. *Dynamis* points to a working force that is inseparable from the one who holds it.

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God (dynamis) unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." **Romans 1:16**

"For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God (dynamis)." **I Corinthians 1:18**

"But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, (dynamis) and the wisdom of God." **I Corinthians 1:24**

"Your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God (dynamis)."
I Corinthians 2:5

"But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the Excellency of the power may be of God (dynamis), and not of us." **II Corinthians 4:7**

"By the word of truth, by the power of God (dynamis), by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left," **II Corinthians 6:7**

"Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God (dynamis);" **II Timothy 1:8**

The only way for this *dynamite* power to end would be for the holder of such power to face corruption. In other words, if God's power does not exist today, then He Himself must also no longer exist. That last line might strike a chord with some for a variety of reasons. Keep in mind that we are not dealing with "how" or "in what way" he does or does not display that power. We are simply acknowledging that God's power is eternal and is not on vacation during the age of grace. God had power yesterday, He has it today, and He will have it forevermore.

"Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever." **Hebrews 13:8**

For just one brief moment before we continue, it's important to pause and evaluate an important question regarding this present age. Has His *power* come to an end since we now have the Word of God? The answer is found in something you may have overlooked.

"Charity never faileth: but whether [there be] prophecies, they shall fail; whether [there be] tongues, they shall cease; whether [there be] knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away." **I Corinthians 13:8-10**

Those things that will come to an end are gifts given to men. If men have the gift of prophecy, that will fail. If men have the gift of tongues, they shall cease. If men have the gift of supernatural knowledge, it shall vanish away. But God, who is and shall be, does not cease to remain the same. His power remains because it is part of His makeup.

Often times, in our grace assemblies and our congregations of fellowship, the academics of understanding our place in the grand scheme lead us to perceive a silent God who no longer cares, no longer pays attention, and no longer has power. I don't encourage any reader to test the King Eternal on what He cares about, what He watches, or how much power He has. You may reasonably evaluate your own place in the big picture, but for now, step back and keep in mind He who is above all.

Our study will lead us to address some of these issues more closely, but right now there is nothing more pressing than to comprehend God in all His power. Remember, this is not about you. This is about taking a look at He who is greater than us all. His *dynasty* has had, does have, and will always have authority, strength, and power.

IMMORTAL, INVISIBLE

Some 1400 years Before Christ, a very fascinating day occurred in which one man, Joshua, commanded the sun to stand still and the moon to stay where it was.

"Then spake Joshua to the Lord in the day when the Lord delivered up the Amorites before the children of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel, Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon. And the sun stood still and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies. [Is] not this written in the book of Jasher? So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down about a whole day. And there was no day like that before it or after it, that the Lord hearkened unto the voice of a man: for the Lord fought for Israel." **Joshua 10:12-15**

As we all know very well, it is the rotation of the earth cycling toward the sun and the moon that give us each new morning and each closing sunset. The day begins and ends with the sun and moon in the sky. Thus, to have control over them and cause them to stop means that the day itself is extended. In one sense, the earth also must stand still and stop its motion if the sun stops.

The importance of this day and our comprehension of it are not as significant as the moment we take now to consider what power God has over time. On the day when Christ prepared to depart into the clouds, the disciples asked about what would happen next. In response, the Lord offered profound insight into supernatural authority.

"It is not for you to know the times or seasons which the Father has fixed by His own authority."
Acts 1:7

Time is a physical condition of this world determined by one who is not limited under its properties. It is God who sets the times. It is God who sets the seasons. Seeking to attend his mind to these eternal truths, David once wrote:

"So teach [us] to number our days, that we may apply [our] hearts to wisdom." **Psalms 90:12**

Earlier in the same chapter, David noted that man spends his days as "a tale that is told." Human life is a historic and temporary gift that, once gone, will only live on in the words of those who knew us. Such a temporary condition is the primary reason that empires, kingdoms, and dynasties do not last very long in the grand scheme of things. Man and the nations he builds will only rule with authority for a season.

The only Potentate has authority over all time and through all time. When he chooses to allow the sun to stand still for Joshua, it stands still. And time itself stops for a few extra hours. He can extend time or diminish it at His choosing.

"Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, [be] honor and glory forever and ever. Amen." I Timothy 1:17

Our word "eternal" is quite simply, "an unbroken age." In the Greek, *aion* (eternal) is where we find a commonly used term called an *eon*. What we're seeing is reference to a King who is eternal. Thus, He can set times, seasons, ages and dispensations for mankind, but He Himself is the King outside of those ages.

This point is crucial because it answers the dilemma posed by the Ultimate Dynasty. How can the only Potentate with authority and strength continue to remain in power? He does so because He is eternal. He does so because He is immortal.

Immortality, however, is not quite the same as being eternal. Indeed we can be assured that God is one, He is the only, He has all authority, He has all strength, He has all power, and He resides outside of time in eternity above all ages... but immortality... this introduces a completely new detail of the Almighty Creator. When a man or woman is referred to by their mortality, they are being identified by natural corruption. Bodies get sick. People get old. Skin gets worn. All of it adds up to a degenerating series of created beings that do not have the option of staying in peak health for an entire lifetime.

The word "immortal" simply means, "uncorrupted by decay." If we think of decay, it's easy to drop our minds into the dentist's office remembering our most recent cavity or issue with plaque. Although we can continue to brush and floss and fill our mouths with all methods of protection, teeth will eventually still find their last day on earth. Decay is an inevitable part of the aging process. If something ages within itself, then it will diminish both in value and quality. Our vehicles are no different when we drive them off the seller's lot.

"Which in his times he shall show, [who is] the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom [be] honor and power everlasting. Amen." I Timothy 6:15-16

While all other authorities come and go throughout the course of time, the King eternal is the only immortal authority. That is, God's authority, strength, and power do not decay or endure corruption. He is the only immortal Potentate. As also mentioned in the passage above, He dwells in "the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see." This enhances our primary study verse:

"Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, [be] honor and glory forever and ever. Amen." I Timothy 1:17

The invisibility factor is by His own choosing. For in the person of Jesus Christ, we find a face beyond the veil:

*"Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated [us] into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, [even] the forgiveness of sins: Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature:" **Colossians 1:13-15***

At any time that God appears in the form of "light," man is at risk of understandable blindness unless there is a veil, or curtain, between he and the brightness before him. Christ, on the other hand, became the visible image of an invisible God. Hence we find that although God is unseen by man, He ultimately chooses when and how men will see Him or know Him. This capacity to conceal all or part of Himself now leads us to contemplate His handling of knowledge, mystery, and wisdom.

GOD OF TRUTH

In 1995, Christopher McQuarrie watched his masterpiece screenplay hit the big screen. *The Usual Suspects* arrived in theaters to moderate excitement and critical praise while earning McQuarrie and Kevin Spacey their first Oscars. *Suspects* was a crime drama telling the unfolding events of what occurred in the lives of five criminals from the perspective of Verbal Kint. Viewers get wrapped up in the story from start to finish, but do not find the answer until the final seconds of the film. With just a few unexpected, Academy-Award-winning footsteps and the opening of a car door, every audience gasps to the realization of what actually happened. As one of the many who was completely caught off-guard by the end result, I found myself wanting to see the movie all over again just to make sure I didn't miss other details along the way.

Mystery novels and films, when well written, have the same effect every time. The author is always the one who knows the beginning from the end and thus attempts to orchestrate the necessary storyline that will protect certain truths from being revealed too quickly. If a truth comes out earlier than it should, a reader may not find cause to continue reading other than their attachment to the characters. The best mystery, then, is the one where truth was truth from the beginning even when the author chose to keep it hidden for the purposes of keeping your attention.

*"For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, if ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit;" **Ephesians 3:1-4***

This mystery is one that we often speak of in our grace assemblies, for it is this mystery of grace, hidden in other ages, that now reveals an aspect of God we will address in *Part Two of The King Eternal*. For something to be a mystery, it must first have been true and unknown to all but one. It can therefore be said that mysteries begin with truth and correct (or, righteous) knowledge. For this reason, we now turn our attention to the God of truth, of righteousness, and of knowledge leading to wisdom.

"Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak [this] to your shame." I Corinthians 15:34

One of the most common approaches to this passage and others like it is to relate "righteousness" to "purity" because it deals with sin. For a moment, however, consider that the term has less to do with purity or holiness and instead draws attention to "right"-ness. That is, awake to what is "right" (or, correct knowledge) by contrast to those who do not have the right, or correct, "Knowledge of God."

Another tendency is for us to see the phrase "knowledge of God" and insert ourselves into it. The subjective, or personal, approach is to see this as "man's knowledge of God." In other words, "some have not their own correct knowledge of God." The objective reading suggests that instead of this being about our knowledge of God, it is simply God's knowledge. While I would not enforce one view over another with any dogmatic insistence, stay with me for a moment to consider why the latter choice may, in fact, be a more appropriate view of the text.

"Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods. But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?" Galatians 4:8-9

It would not be incorrect or even foolish to say that we, as believers, have knowledge of God. But as the passage above indicates, while one might say that they know God, it is even more emphatic to say that you are known *of* God, or by God. It is always His knowledge that supersedes our own and as we are asked to "walk worthy" of our calling (Ephesians 4:1), coming to grips with God's knowledge can and will ultimately lead us to "awake unto righteousness."

Here we find ourselves confronted with the idea that God, the One and Only Potentate, has knowledge beyond our own. What's more, He is not just spoken about as having knowledge, but that He is always right.

"(As it is written, He hath dispersed abroad; he hath given to the poor: his righteousness remaineth forever.)" II Corinthians 9:9

He is right all the time. His rightness, or righteousness, will last forever. A sharp contrast is made to mankind:

"As it is written, there is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God." Romans 3:10-11

Because of our condition, it is often difficult to consider one whose knowledge is always correct and will remain accurate for eternity no matter what age passes by. But righteousness comes from one who is true. For you are only right if the information you hold is true.

"But [as] God [is] true, our word toward you was not yea and nay." II Corinthians 1:18

"For they themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God;" I Thessalonians 1:9

The Gospel of John utilizes this term "true" in giving God several different descriptions such as the true light (1:9), the true bread (6:32), and the true vine (15:1). In each case, what we're dealing with are the building blocks of something that was once hidden. Like a vast and complex million-piece puzzle where, depending on how much time you have and how many pieces you're given, you'll still only know as much of the truth as you have time and resources to know. If that sounds complicated, it's intended to be. More simply put, God has all truth, He is always right about that truth, and He only reveals that righteous truth in the form of a mystery when he chooses to do so. All these pieces put together equal the knowledge of God.

Knowledge, as many might already be familiar, comes from the Greek word *gnosis*. Out of this term, two main deviations in church history have risen up. The first were the *Gnostic Gospels*. Highlighted recently in the *Da Vinci Code* film (and book of the same name), the Gnostic Gospels were those written books and testaments of witness that proclaimed to be inspired text coming from the "knowledge" of God. Today we often take for granted what remained and what did not in the canon of the Bible, but scholars and Christians debated for quite some time before reaching the conclusion of our current 66 books. Debate has continued through the present day between Catholics and Protestants who battle over additional books that are believed missing or false.

The second deviation is the *agnostic* belief system. Many of our young college students are coming out of church backgrounds and into an agnostic belief about God. Essentially, what they claim is that God must indeed exist because it's hard to argue otherwise, but whom and what He is can be anyone's best guess. In a sense, according to agnostics, Muslims might have truth as much as the Mormons or Buddhists. Truth, for them, is relative. But what few of them consider is the title by which they identify themselves so proudly. To be a-*gnostic* is to have "no knowledge" just as to be a-theistic is to have "no God." Latin makes it much more easily understood. For to be "without knowledge" in the Latin tongue is to be an *ignoramus*. Trying saying that to the next agnostic you meet on the road.

Righteous knowledge, in contrast, comes with a great deal of responsibility. For if there is correct knowledge of anything, improper handling of that knowledge can be destructive or harmful to other listeners. It is not knowledge, therefore, that handles itself, but wisdom. Once again, we find our Potentate to have another attribute of worthy note.

"But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God." **I Corinthians 1:24**

"But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, [even] the hidden [wisdom], which God ordained before the world unto our glory:" **I Corinthians 2:7**

"In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." **Colossians 2:3**

Wisdom, when it comes from God, draws a connection with hidden wealth. Treasures because they are true, but hidden because wealth received too quickly is a richness easily mishandled. For that reason, like the little child that climbs in her father's arms, there is a curiosity to know what we do not know. There is a desire to unlock the secret garden. Anyone given the key believes they have been given access to something that few others have known.

"Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, [be] honor and glory forever and ever. Amen." **I Timothy 1:17**

The only "wise God" fills this title with His management of knowledge and truth. By establishing mysteries, He makes both pieces so much more valuable to those who do not have them. When someone uncovers a mystery that they did not know beforehand, we often find them exclaiming, "Wow! I can't believe I didn't see it long ago!" It's as though they have found a prize, a bundle of cash, or a pearl that was sitting underneath their couch for years. And in the end, it is the wisdom of God in that concealed truth that receives all honor and glory.

"[It is] the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honor of kings [is] to search out a matter."
Proverbs 25:2

EXCLUSION OF THE KING

In 1999, just a few weeks after realizing that I had become a dispensationalist in my thinking and in my approach to the Scriptures, several vocabulary words and phrases quickly became uncomfortable. Whether it was a casual Christian making reference to "the kingdom" or even a more studied Christian making mention that "faith without works is dead," such statements seemed to always bring along a frustration to my ears.

One such phrase that stirred irritation was the popular and largely familiar, "Jesus is my King!" To which, in my early years as a grace believer, I would arrogantly declare, "Jesus is NOT my King!" As a follow-up, I would quickly say, "But He is my Savior and Lord, Praise Him forever!" It was too late. Listeners had already turned away. Any intention I may have had of making a case for II Timothy 2:15 and "rightly dividing the word of truth" was lost.

Similar declarations have been made by hoards of grace believers throughout Christendom and have thus earned us an easy label of "hyper-dispensational." Hyper, of course, because we say things so outlandish at times that young Christians can only think we are members of a cult or confused from too much thinking. Those deemed "hyper" in the things they do are generally "overexcited." In a sense, a hyper-child is a child that rarely thinks before they speak and because of that carelessness, they can often be more harmful than profitable in their relationships. Certainly not all that dispensational students and teachers say is without thought or without truth. It is this issue of kingship, however, that I believe we shy away from because of discomfort.

For those who may be less familiar with the subject of dispensationalism, let me quote from the well-known C. R. Stam in his widely-read *Things That Differ*:

"It is a striking fact that the very opening words of the Bible read: *'In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth.'* It does not say that He created the universe, but *the heaven and the earth*. This is because He had a purpose concerning *the earth* quite distinct from His purpose concerning heaven. His purpose concerning *the earth* and Christ's reign upon it is the subject of prophecy (II Peter 1:16-19). His purpose concerning *heaven* and our exaltation there with Christ is the subject of *'the mystery'* (Ephesians 2:4-10, 3:1-4). Into these two great subjects the Bible is basically divided."⁶

Dispensationalism is, without great explanation, the belief that God has revealed different administrations, or economies (Gk.*oikonomia*), throughout the history of time. These dispensations are therefore uniquely defined by the way God deals with mankind and what He expects from them during

each age. Stam goes on to write that it is this present dispensation of God's grace through the Body of Christ which fills heavenly realms, while it is Israel who still awaits a promised future on the earth.

Due to the fact that there are Scriptures applicable to Israel and Scriptures applicable to the Body of Christ, a great fear arises among those who have come to learn what Scriptures apply to the present Body of Christ. If the earth includes a future kingdom and a future King for an earthly people (which we are not) and we are awaiting heavenly hope in heavenly places among heavenly bodies, what will become of our conversations if we intermix terms? Shouldn't we flee the remotest appearance of blended terms?

This fear invades all that we study and all that we discuss until we blind ourselves to the most evident truths that may, quite often, rest just under our noses that we've let grow long from self-deception.

Here we must again go back to the original statement of discomfort, "Jesus is my King." Is He our King or is He just simply the King? While many of you know just how important this question is, others are not so taken aback. Instead of jumping to an answer, let's begin by going to our title verse.

"Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, [be] honor and glory forever and ever. Amen." **I Timothy 1:17**

To be the "king" is to be the highest authority over a people. Within the Word, we know of numerous kingships and in each case, they related to one whose power is greater than all others in their respective kingdoms. Even the concept of a "kingdom" is shortened from "the king's domain." And a king, while he is seated in the highest place of authority, has those who reign "with" him.

"Blessed and holy [is] he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years." **Revelation 20:6**

This, as many will quickly recognize, is a reference to those who reign with Christ in the coming kingdom on earth. We know it to be of earthly relevance for several reasons, but the most clear of which has to do with time. This "reign" is with Christ for a thousand years (temporary). From a heavenly perspective, a thousand years that pass for men are but a glimpse of yesterday to God.

"For a thousand years in thy sight [are but] as yesterday when it is past, and [as] a watch in the night." **Psalms 90:4**

"But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day [is] with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." **II Peter 3:8**

"Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever." **Hebrews 13:8**

We learned earlier that God manages time because He Himself is outside of it. Thus, when mention is given about reigning "with" Christ for a thousand years, we must consider that it involves a reign that happens "within" time. This can only happen on the earth. For in heaven, as we saw in an earlier section, God's perspective is eternal and never-ending. Hence, if anyone is to "reign with" Christ for a thousand years, it must be a group destined for earthly blessings. We, however, are not destined for earthly blessings, but are instead destined for blessings in heaven:

*"Blessed [be] the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly [places] in Christ:" **Ephesians 1:3***

If this is the case and Paul still acknowledges the King, what relationship do believers in the age of grace hope to do with Christ in "heavenly places" if not reign?

*"[It is] a faithful saying: For if we be dead with [him], we shall also live with [him]: If we suffer, we shall also reign with [him]: if we deny [him], he also will deny us." **II Timothy 2:11-12***

And so it is that we find ourselves noticing both a heavenly reign and an earthly reign. With no hesitation and without fear that readers might get the wrong message, Paul speaks boldly about the heavenly King and His kingdom.

*"Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated [us] into the kingdom of his dear Son:" **Colossians 1:13***

*"And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve [me] unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom [be] glory for ever and ever. Amen." **II Timothy 4:18***

*"Which in his times he shall show, [who is] the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords;" **I Timothy 6:15***

If there is, indeed, a "heavenly kingdom," then there is also, without question, a heavenly King. For a kingdom cannot be without an ultimate authority. As we already learned, the "only Potentate" is the One with authority. He is, therefore, the King of kings, He is the King eternal, and yes, He is our King of kings and our King eternal. You are a child of the Most High God. The King eternal is YOUR King eternal.

Let it sink in and stay close, my friends. We're about to walk into the riches of His glory.

HONOR AND GLORY

Choirs and churches have long filled auditoriums with the sound of many voices echoing the familiar Doxology. At times, we might hear trumpets and trombones combining for the ceremonial service. More often than not, this continues on in very traditional assemblies or during our attendance at a classical concert.

"Praise God, from whom all blessings flow
Praise Him, all creatures here below
Praise Him above, ye heav'nly host
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost"

Although the song doesn't usually slide into our earphones and music players of this modern day, the lyrics resonate quite powerfully through any age. Such a common doxology is known as a

"word of exaltation" or "word of glory" (Greek: *doxa* = glory; *logos* = word). Early in our study, we learned that "glory" is simply the "most exalted state" of the object, person, or thing it describes.

"At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of [things] in heaven, and [things] in earth, and [things] under the earth;" **Philippians 2:10**

Often we find ourselves academically confident that to "fall on our knees" would be too earthly and too human when we think of ourselves, in some way, as superhuman. Nothing could be further from the truth. We are not in any way superior to the heirs of the earth that we might fathom standing in the presence of God without falling on our knees. They will fall and so shall we.

"For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man." **Ephesians 3:14-16**

"But my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus."
Philippians 4:19

Knees buckle in the presence of greatness, but they also bend to the acknowledgement of what we do not have by comparison. To be "rich" in glory is not merely to have glory, which is above all most exalted, but to have an abundance of exaltation. Even the seed that is planted and arises from the ground in the form of a beautiful creation has only a single glory to declare. It is glorious, yes, but it is glorious within its own capacity. When the Scripture says that the Father is "rich" in glory, a much more incredible truth is being revealed.

Well-endowed businessmen often give pep talks on the means to acquire great wealth. Themes often include statements like, "Don't rush to spend, be patient and save." Common sense tells us that if we spend, our wealth decreases. If we save, our wealth naturally increases because we are not spending. Now, pause for a moment and think about where this is going. Did you figure it out, yet?

The Father is "rich" in glory because He saves those who have no glory on their own. God increases His own glory through saving grace.

"For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him." **Romans 10:12**

He has plenty to give. And for that, God is great. You might find yourself giggling to recall the phrase "God is great" because it brings back memories of childhood prayers before each meal:

"God is great, God is good
Let us thank Him for our food"

While this famous prayer even makes me smile as I remember family gatherings and children who keep their eyes open to watch what everyone else is doing, it is not the desired intention for "God is great."

"For the Lord [is] a great God and a great King above all gods." **Psalms 95:3**

"Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ;" Titus 2:13

The Greek word underneath "great" is *megas*. And you're absolutely right if you're thinking what I think you're thinking. To be "mega" is to be large in scope and size beyond the normal measure. That is, when we see that God is great, we are recognizing Him as willing and able to do more than we can ask or imagine.

"Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us," Ephesians 3:20

"Great [is] the Lord, and greatly to be praised; and his greatness [is] unsearchable." Psalm 145:3

King David speaks about God's greatness as unsearchable. And on this truth we must rest our hats. We have searched out the depths of God's glory and discovered many details. But in a search of His greatness, we find ourselves unable to go higher. For what can be greater than the greatest? At this end, the King eternal proves Himself worthy of all honor.

Soldiers find honor in their service. Patriots find honor in their loyalty. But God, who is "rich in mercy," is not alone honored because of what He has done or will do. He is honored because of who He is.

"Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, [be] honor and glory forever and ever. Amen." I Timothy 1:17

"Which in his times he shall show, [who is] the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom [be] honor and power everlasting. Amen." I Timothy 6:15-16

Greek use of the term "honor" refers to a fixed value that does not change or waiver based on conditions. Believers are often quick to say that He "deserves" honor or that He "deserves" glory for what He has done in their lives, through their lives, or during the course of another's life, but in no uncertain terms does Paul say that honor and glory simply belong to Him.

He is the only King, the only Potentate, the only wise, and the only One. For that He is exalted and honored above anything we have received or hope to receive.

THE CROWNING TOUCH

Trying to conclude a study of God's glory leaves me utterly insufficient. While I have been warmed in spirit by a review of this great picture the Lord has given us, His glory extends far beyond anything we've covered in these pages. We have allowed the light of God's Word to shine on His depths, but there is much more to see. As this phase of *The King Eternal* comes to its close in preparation to look at *The Glory of His Grace*, join with me in review of who He is.

He is one.
He is the only.
He is all in one.
He has all authority, all power, and all strength.
He is the blessed Potentate.
He is the ultimate dynasty.
He is eternal.
He is immortal, invisible.
He is incorruptible.
He is truth.
He has all knowledge.
He is right, righteous, and mysterious.
He is the only wise.
He is glorious.
He is rich in glory.
He is great.
He receives all honor.
He is the King of kings.
He is the Lord of lords.

Let your knees fall, for He is the King eternal.

Amen

PART TWO



THE GLORY OF HIS GRACE
(Ephesians 1:6)

GROUND ZERO

Atop the rubble of broken glass, charred metal and unsorted ashes, the President of the United States stood and listened to the voices of tearful and angry workers who were witnesses to the events of September 11, 2001. While some of the men shouted that they couldn't hear what he was saying, he gently took the bullhorn and spoke those unforgettable words, "I hear you! And the people who knocked these buildings down will hear all of us soon!" Cheers rocked the nation that day as citizens all across the country watched the declaration on their television screens in the mid afternoon. Here was our president standing in the midst of filth that was unbecoming of his position. And we adored his bravado.

Certainly time has created political debate about the decisions that have followed those famous words, but nonetheless, Americans looked on with hope that good could come of disaster. The standing presence of our highest authority made it much easier to conceive of possibility. Our president gave hope when he could have hidden in the security of his own position.

"And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth." Genesis 1:26

Man was given dominion under God, but over all the earth. This dominion was created by one whose heavenly *kingdom* is eternal. Thus, an earthly "kingdom" was established, though not in such specific terms. A kingdom being any land under which authority is granted, the earth was indeed established to have a throne with man in its seat.

Yet we ask ourselves, why make anything when you have everything? Indeed, if He is all powerful in and of Himself, what would compel Him to come out from behind the veil of His own glory to create the earth and design man as its caretaker?

The answers are found in the glory of His grace. None of us expected to be created, nor did we expect that He should save us from sin. His operation on our behalf is a thing of matchless wonder. For here we stand as men and women, offspring of a divine image and subject to an unforgettable fall. We continue to be affected by the lasting impression of sin, but it was the King eternal who left an unforgettable footprint in our ground zero.

WALKING IN THE GARDEN

To this day, I can still remember running into my parents' master bedroom at the sound of commercials for *The Neverending Story* or *Return of the Jedi*. What races to my memory is the childhood eagerness to see what everyone else was watching. One such preview that captured my imagination was *The Karate Kid*. In 1984, this would have been considered a summer blockbuster and every "kid" wanted to see it. But as with later films like *Top Gun* and *Goonies*, my father held a tight leash on what his son was allowed to see. *Karate Kid* was no exception.

Dad's concern wasn't unwarranted. As a little boy, I often found myself trying to replicate *He-Man* with a stick pointed to the sky or riding my *Big Wheel* as though it were straight out of *Knight Rider*. My father took caution with the possibility that a fighting movie might encourage me to experiment with certain kicks and various moves portrayed on screen. His decision was a clear and emphatic, "No." With my best interest at heart, he concluded that I was too young.

After the film had reached Betamax (some of us still remember), a neighborhood friend provided me the opportunity to have an afternoon of disobedience. When I left the house in the cool of the early evening, a chill ran down my spine as it suddenly dawned on me: my parents might ask what I had been doing. Lies spilled out onto the carpet that night, but it wasn't long before my father knew the truth.

The very next day at school, eager to show my friends how to do the "Crane Kick," I stood at the entrance to the doorway where we all waited for our rides. My right leg went up, and just as my left leg prepared to switch places in midair, the corner of my eye caught a familiar silhouette in the door. There he was, but it was too late. My foot was inches from the face of another little boy as my father watched in disbelief.

Our ride home was near silent. Ashamed as I was for what had happened, I knew what the penalty was. Disobedience was equivalent to punishment as far as I was concerned. When we arrived home, my little body trembled its way into the back bedroom as I sat on my father's bed and began to cry. With my head drooped low, he walked in after me and my tears grew deeper. I held out my hands and asked him to hit them with his belt. And in that moment, my father's eyes were full of merciful tears of his own. To this day, I remember his gentle hands touching mine as he kneeled down, reached out, and let me fall into an embrace of his mercy.

At the fall of man in Genesis 3, Scripture says that Adam and Eve were "ashamed" of their nakedness. Whether or not one holds to a hard-line view of predestination, it's easy to wonder if the Lord had prepared to walk into the garden that day for other reasons (like discussing the future of the world with Adam). Instead, knowing that His creation had fallen, we're more likely to imagine the voice of a disappointing sigh.

"And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden."

Genesis 3:8

Remember now, if you will, that the Lord God who walked into the garden was the one and only authority, the blessed Potentate, the eternal, the immortal, the invisible, the incorruptible, the true, wise, righteous, mysterious, glorious, great, honorable King of kings and Lord of lords. This was the King eternal and He was walking into the midst of shame.

*"(For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, [that they are] the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end [is] destruction, whose God [is their] belly, and whose glory [is] in their shame, who mind earthly things.)" **Philippians 3:18-19***

To have shame is to be without your honor. And as we learned at the end of the *Riches of His Glory*, honor is an unconditional, fixed value that someone holds. Thus, to lose your honor is to lose your value and become subject to conditions of consequence. When Paul speaks about men whose "glory is in their shame," he is making reference to those who actually take pleasure in their lack of honor. Even moreso, these are men and women who lift up their dishonor as an exalted point of recognition for others to see.

Human kind will often make excuses for what they've done, but Adam and Eve wouldn't have fallen into the category of taking "glory in their shame." They recognized their sin, hid among the shadows, and in walked the King. Pausing as though He stood before a lost sheep, the Lord spoke gently.

"And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where [art] thou?" **Genesis 3:9**

Out of His glory, God created the heavens and the earth. Out of the earth, God formed a man. Out of man, He formed a woman. And when both fell to their most vulnerable shame, He called out to the man. But why ask for Adam's location if He is all knowing?

The answer is quite simple, but often forgotten within academic circles of the most sound doctrinal teaching. He asked because He has patience. This is a form of patience willing to ask something that's already known. He also asked because He is kind. He asked because He is gentle. To find Adam and ask for his response is to begin the process of deliverance and redemption. Adam fell, that's true, but God's first inclination was to find him so that a broken man could stand up.

FATHER OF MERCIES

On a quiet afternoon in 1845, Henry David Thoreau could often be found returning to his personally constructed home near Walden Pond. While it was not much larger than a walk-in closet, his sense of privacy could always be shaken by the leftover evidence of someone who had dropped by or passed through. "They who come rarely to the woods take some little piece of the forest into their hands to play with by the way." He goes on to say that he could "always tell" if visitors had been present during his absence because they would leave behind a trail of their footprints, plucked grass by the wayside, or bended twigs in the path. ¹

The broken pieces of a fig tree were evidence of shame in the garden, but it was God who made the headlines of that story. If newspapers had covered that day's events, the morning paper might have read: GLORIOUS KING TAKES WALK IN MAN'S GARDEN. And curious readers would likely flip to the article asking, "Why come out of glory to walk in some man's garden?"

"Blessed [be] God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort;" **II Corinthians 1:3**

The Father in heaven who created all things above and all things below stepped onto the earth because He is also the "Father of mercies." The term "mercies" is often associated in Scripture with, of all things, the "bowels."

"Look down from heaven, and behold from the habitation of thy holiness and of thy glory: where [is] thy zeal and thy strength, the sounding of thy bowels and of thy mercies toward me? are they restrained?" **Isaiah 63:15**

"If [there be] therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies," **Philippians 2:1**

"Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering;" **Colossians 3:12**

If we have cause to question what it means to equate "bowels" with something other than a restroom break, we need not look very far:

"My bowels, my bowels! I am pained at my very heart; my heart maketh a noise in me; I cannot hold my peace, because thou hast heard, O my soul, the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war."

Jeremiah 4:19

"Behold, O Lord; for I [am] in distress: my bowels are troubled; mine heart is turned within me; for I have grievously rebelled: abroad the sword bereaveth, at home [there is] at death."

Lamentations 1:20

The barrier that many find themselves trying to climb over is whether or not God Himself has a similar expression or an emotion so deep. Certainly we can fathom our own painful experiences when the hurt was so deep that we could feel it in our innermost place. Six weeks after losing his father to a battle with colon cancer (no pun intended), my own broken father stood in the doorway of my bedroom, made eye contact with me, and fell in my arms to weep. To this day, I will never forget the depth of his tears and the trembling of his body as the sorrow of loss hit hard. The source of our greatest cries will usually come from the pit of our stomach and the splitting core of our gut. How, if men can experience such 'gut-wrenching' pain, can we relate that to God? Truth is, we don't have to draw a connection because He already has.

"For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ."

Philippians 1:8

*"Mine eyes do fail with tears, my bowels are troubled, my liver is poured upon the earth, for the destruction of the daughter of my people; because the children and the sucklings swoon in the streets of the city." **Lamentations 2:11***

*"[Is] Ephraim my dear son? [is he] a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord." **Jeremiah 31:20***

Making every effort to express himself in ways that we will also understand, God describes His own reactions to the earth in terms of physical depth. The "bowels of Jesus Christ" are the "depths" of His compassion. We often recite the mercies of God for not giving us what we deserve, but there is a much more profound truth behind it all.

"[It is of] the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not."

Lamentations 3:22

"But though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies."

Lamentations 3:32

*"The Lord is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy." **Psalms 145:8***

When the Lord God acts with mercy, we might do well to recognize that He is withholding a judgmental hand, but we would cut ourselves short of understanding to forget that He withholds that hand because He actually has compassion for us as His creation. Careless statements have plagued

many within dispensational circles for the false assertion that "God doesn't care about you in this age." Quite the contrary is true of this glorious and eternal King.

"And that the Gentiles might glorify God for [his] mercy." **Romans 15:9a**

"But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us," **Ephesians 2:4**

If you had the ability to put yourself into the fig leaves of Adam and Eve during that chilly moment when they realized their sin, imagine the first questions that might race through your mind. What will God say? What will He do? Will He even come back for us?

Modern minds probably jump to the first two questions because they involve the potential reactionary decisions of God. That last question, I suggest, is more fitting to the situation. Do we not conceive of the notion that God could have recognized what happened and decided to destroy the entire earth without saying goodbye? Certainly He could have, but there He was walking and calling out to Adam. And there was Adam, peering out from behind a bush. And there was hope in the midst of shame.

"Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope."
Romans 15:13

If it was you in the garden and you heard the voice of the Lord calling your name, how likely is it that you would surrender a deep sigh of relief in the midst of your shame? Simply walking into the garden that day was remarkable because He didn't have to do it. But by emerging on the scene, God introduced hope to His creation.

"For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?" **Romans 8:24**

To have "mercy" is to have kindness toward the miserable and helpless individuals who need it. Until a verdict is read aloud before a courtroom, the accused still stands with hope that mercy will be extended in their favor. God saw the gulf that man had created with His sin and still reached across that expanse like a judge to a criminal. So long as He was there, hope remained in the company of shame.

SLOW TO ANGER

Mercy cannot exclusively be called the "reaction" of God to man's sin, for there were indeed punishments to follow. On the other hand, the pagan world grew very familiar with a belief that suggested any divine power would usually act in anger. Offended by a piece of legislation in the senate, Greeks might claim that they hear thunder in the distance and explain that it was the "anger of the gods." In the end, what they were creating was a sense that all supernatural authority has an instantaneous reaction to the things that were bothersome among men.

Our God chose to strike up a conversation with Adam before laying down the law. This hesitation to respond in anger and first ask a question shows a side of the King eternal that hasn't yet been identified.

"Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus:" **Romans 15:5**

The Greek word, *hupomone*, helps to illustrate this idea of patience as "not bending under trial" such as we might find in James 1:3. In other words, when we ask ourselves with urgency why God did not immediately burn Adam or why He waited through more than 1600 years of sin before sending the flood, what we're asking is why the King did not work *faster*. Often times, we set up our own measured timetable for how we believe God should have done this or might better have done that. Yet, it is the wisdom of God to endure through even the most difficult challenges.

"[What] if God, willing to show [his] wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction:" **Romans 9:22**

Paul puts a question out there on the table. He asks, "What if the Almighty God, willing to demonstrate a greater picture of Himself, chose to endure the sin of the world?" And a reader must ask the ultimate follow-up. But why? Why would He endure sin when He can simply destroy it?

"And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory," **Romans 9:23**

That's powerful information. If God's intent is to "make known" His glory through vessels of mercy, He must first be patient enough to "endure" all the hardship that comes with such a decision. To clarify, God must not merely be patient *enough*, but He must Himself BE patience. And that He is.

What if, in five years, you knew that all of your children would be walking worthy of the cross, your business would skyrocket, your income would flourish, your profits would exceed enough to support others who were hurting, and you could give almost all of your time to the ministry of God's grace? Would you, in the meantime, be willing to endure a near-death battle with cancer or see a grandchild lose their life in a car accident? Perhaps you say, "Well, those aren't fair options, I'd gladly give my life for a grandchild." You're absolutely right. These are not "fair" options. As human beings, such overriding choices rarely exist because things usually hit us from around a corner without expectation. The point isn't whether or not they are fair, but whether you could stand outside of yourself for a moment and consider the idea of endurance. Not endurance for a short period of time without knowing what lies ahead, but the endurance that exists for one who knows the beginning from the end. What if you, willing to see all of your children walking in Christ, were also willing to lose others? Taking it to the next level, what if you were willing to lose your own life in order to see all of your children walking in Christ?

These are no fairer to ask of mankind than they are for us to ask of God. He is patient simply because He is patient. And where men deserve the worst, for reasons of His own glory, He is full of mercy. This mercy comes as a result of patient judgment where the convicted can either be sent to their death or given the hope of a future.

How many of us can look back and recall a time that we "flew off the handle" with regard to someone who offended us? How many of us can look back just in the past month or week to see such urgent anger bursting out of our otherwise God-fearing lives? Our tendency in life is to seek the immediate solution for whatever ails us. If the lawnmower doesn't start, we kick it. If the printer

doesn't work, we yell at it. And if the service we're getting somewhere isn't up to par with what we want, we ask for a manager right away. Our responses to discomfort or displeasure are built on impatience. We want what we want when we want it. As a result, impatient reactions mean that we are quick to anger.

"The Lord [is] merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy." **Psalm 103:8**

"The Lord [is] gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy." **Psalm 145:8**

We saw Psalm 145 earlier when noting the compassion of God, but there is an important contrast here to make. God can be angry, yes. God has anger, yes. But He is "full" of compassion more so than He is "full" of anger. In other words, God's compassion outweighs His anger. If someone stirs His anger, Biblical characters are more likely to find His compassion, His patience, and His mercy before the strike of His backhand. It is this truth that so many unsaved people in the world cannot comprehend and by many measures, believers do not relay it with much conviction. In part, I believe, we fail to share it because we fear the possibility of implying that God is tolerant.

"Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance." **Romans 2:4**

"Whom God hath set forth [to be] a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;" **Romans 3:25**

The word *forbearance* is found almost thirty times in different variations throughout Scripture, but in each case, it usually attaches itself to the idea of "temporary toleration." Unfortunately for mainstream political Christians, toleration now has a horribly poor stigma that's tough to get away from. If we believe that those who live in a homosexual situation should have the same "free" rights as anyone else, are we then "tolerating" their behavior? If we believe that those who have gone down a road of an active pre-marital relationship should be embraced, are we perpetuating the notion of "toleration?"

Just as before, these are difficult questions that aren't the responsibility of any one person to answer. What we're dealing with is the mind and heartbeat of God. And in so doing, this portion of our study has so far been narrowing down the way in which our King eternal has been reckoned with mercy. In order to have the truest form of mercy, compassion, and patience, you must be willing to tolerate, or *forbear*, that which would otherwise give you cause to act in anger. God is rich in forbearance because, quite frankly, He has tolerated sin for ages beyond our own. Through His patient tolerance, our God is longsuffering.

In the year that preceded our engagement, my future wife taught me the applied meaning of this term. When faced with a deeply troubling situation at her church, I found myself often declaring that she should "leave and find someplace that could minister to her needs." Her response to me was gradual, but nevertheless direct. She went on to explain how her situation was tough, yes, but that there were believers in that church who were encouraged every morning that she showed up. In other words, she wasn't making decisions based on her own state of mind or her own emotional turmoil. She was making decisions based on the best interest of just a few whose smile or spoken word made it worth the pain. In the end, her conviction to stand fast and "suffer long" brought healing to

relationships that were otherwise broken. And to a more personal end, her lesson of patience was my lesson in humility.

"But thou, O Lord, [art] a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth." **Psalm 86:15**

"And account [that] the longsuffering of our Lord [is] salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you;" **II Peter 3:15**

Deeply cutting to our hearts as it is, the longer the Lord suffers, the more people are saved. The sooner He ends His suffering, the closer salvation comes to a close. And in the end, it's like being between a rock and a hard place (as they say). For if God pulls out all of His children and ushers in His wrath, He can no more display His mercy. What a fortune that we are not forced to wrestle between such depths of mercy and patience!

METHODS OF MERCY

Beyond the mercy and beyond the patience is the method with which our King extends Himself. If you've ever known what it was to give someone mercy, then you can probably also remember the way in which you gave it. Did you give mercy with a snide remark? Did you show patience while expressing how displeased you were with the situation? The extension of mercy is often the truest test of a man's pride.

"Now I Paul myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, who in presence [am] base among you, but being absent am bold toward you:" **II Corinthians 10:1**

Speaking of the "meekness" and "gentleness" of Christ, Paul introduces His readers to a key attribute of the Savior. To be *meek* is to be rather "tame" in one's handling of a situation. Some might go so far as to say that meekness is closely associated with being "mild" in your disposition. Most of us who are given the choice between "mild" or "spicy" on a restaurant menu are usually inclined toward the softer side because we can't quite be sure of just HOW spicy an item may be. Granted, some of you may join me in going after foods that have a "kick," but I've recently discovered that they don't do well for my heart. Presenting a food, a message, or a thought with *meekness* is to serve something that is less likely to cause harm during digestion (be it spiritual or physical).

Along with being mild comes the underrated quality of *gentleness*. One of the most cultured greetings in the English language is to address a man as a *gentleman*. And why not, right? Aren't all men truly gentle? Few characteristics of God are so lost in a presentation of grace than that of *gentleness*.

The Greek word for gentleness, *epieikeia*, is found with the translation "clemency" in Acts 24:4. Having all authority to make decisions through an iron clad fist, clemency suggests that the agency with power is calm during the exercise of their mercy. No snide remarks. No cutting statements. No ultimatums. No punch in the face. Gentleness is, quite simply, the calm and patient expression of God's mercy.

"That in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in [his] kindness toward us through Christ Jesus." **Ephesians 2:7**

"But after that the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared." **Titus 3:4**

Over the past ten years, I've had the privilege of meeting a fair number of dispensational believers who clearly stood at the perimeter of their local assemblies. While being welcome to participate in "church," these men and women would often find themselves frustrated by the discovery that God is kind while at the same time, His people are so unkind. Perhaps it could be said that kindness itself rests in the eye of the beholder, but to what end is there a measure? Are we kind because we say that we are kind? Are we gentle because we say that we are gentle? Are we meek because we say that we are meek? Certainly the truest defense of our character must come from those who are recipients of it. And to that end, the Scriptures speak for themselves with regard to the kindness of God:

"But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and [to] the evil." **Luke 6:35**

"For his merciful kindness is great toward us: and the truth of the Lord [endureth] forever. Praise ye the Lord." **Psalms 117:2**

This is the measure of God's kindness. It is great. It is extended to the unthankful. It is given to the evil. And our God does not change by the shifting of time or the passing of ages.

Among the many mercies of God are the lessons found in His method. For He neither presents His mercy in a hurry or expects that man will embrace it without hearing the message through gentleness, meekness, and kindness. Who among us would adore the gift of several million dollars if it were weighed down by iron anchors smashing our feet? Surely we would never be able to use it because we had never really received it. The most profitable method of mercy, therefore, is the one spoken with gentleness, shared in meekness, and given through kindness.

THE OPERATING TABLE

Whether you were glued to the television sensation of *ER* during the 1990s or still occasionally see what's new in the thirteenth season, most of us have an image of the hectic emergency room with or without the flat screen. We visualize doctors and nurses huddled around a patient with the united purpose of bringing that individual restored health. This photograph in our minds involves something very key. Mending a broken life only comes through the *operating* and *working* hand of someone who is in a condition to do so.

If you'll recall from an earlier study on the excluded King, there are many taboo subjects within grace teaching and dispensational circles. One such topic involves the positioning of God and whether or not He *works* (present tense) in this age. Perhaps some readers who are new to dispensationalism (or have nothing at all to do with it) are quick to find this line of debate practically absurd. Likely you find yourself rushing to ask, "Why, then, would anyone pray if He is not still working?" Before jumping to conclusions without hearing the argument, let me explain a little bit of

the case for a "non-working God" in this present age. Please bear in mind that there is quite another case for the "working God" to be made that we'll dig into soon enough.

"Charity never faileth: but whether [there be] prophecies, they shall fail; whether [there be] tongues, they shall cease; whether [there be] knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away." **I Corinthians 13:8-10**

Grace believers, including myself, tend to see this passage as referring to the completion of the Word of God. In other words, while love itself will never end, prophecy, tongues, and supernatural knowledge will end because the complete and perfect Word of God will make them no longer necessary. One of the common arguments opposing this is from those who believe that "the perfect" refers to Christ's future return in glory. While there are vast numbers of people who can make this reasonable counterargument, one thing that the "non-working God" view builds on is that knowledge vanishes away.

By knowledge, we are indeed referring to the kind of knowledge that is given as a spiritual gift.

"But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit;"
I Corinthians 12:7-8

Having a "word of knowledge" refers to a supernatural knowledge directly from God. In a recent chapel service I attended at school, our campus pastor introduced the special speaker by saying, "Let's pray that the Lord would open our hearts to the words that he has to share with us." To be fair, the speaker that morning used Romans 12 as his foundational teaching, but he also spoke from Aristotle and Edgar Allen Poe in order to better express his message to the audience. Are his words, those that include Aristotle and Poe, the words of God to us? Certainly not.

It is this that causes many within our circles to acknowledge that God only speaks through a venue of His Word. For if He is continuing to speak, it ought to be important enough that we write that which we hear down on paper, correct? Men from Muhammad to Joseph Smith claimed to have spoken with God through the person of Jesus Christ. And indeed they wrote down what they believed that He told them. Thus our world is now blended with Islam and Mormonism. And to that conclusion, we must concur that God's Word is complete and that He does not continue to reveal "more truth" beyond what His Word has already made perfect.

However, in saying all of this and making the case for a rather silent God who asks us to study His Word faithfully as Bereans (Acts 17:11, II Timothy 2:15), many men have extended such a conclusion to the point that they declare He neither works, nor cares about the "goings on" of mankind. This leap from silence to stillness is rather obscure and undefined, but no doubt I will incur the wrath of those who disagree. By no means shall it ever rest beneath me to accept a Biblical counterargument of God's decision to "stop" working in this age. If such an explanation exists, I welcome it.

But rather than muddle in the sorrow of what seems to be an illogical hurdle to jump, let us first go back to the illustration of an emergency room operating table. The scenario displays men and women *working* and *operating*. In other words, they are pouring their *energy* into someone who is either sick or injured.

"Buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with [him] through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead." **Colossians 2:12**

Surely even the most opposed to a presently working God can agree that Colossians speaks to His operation in the raising of Christ from the dead. And surely, we can admit to one another that this was a past event. In other words, this particular "operation of God" was one that took place on our behalf and does not take place in the current day. And praise be to the Lord that it DID happen in the past!

The word *operation* comes from the Greek word *energeia*. If you tried sounding it out, you probably heard *inertia*, but if you simply looked at it, you no doubt saw *energy*. This particular *energeia* shows up eight times in the New Testament. Seven times it refers to the workings of God and once it refers to the workings of Satan. But in the grand scheme of things, *energeia* points to a supernatural operating system rather than a human one.

"Whereunto I also labor, striving according to his working (energeia) which worketh (energeo) in me mightily." **Colossians 1:29**

Certainly it could always be said that God's supernatural working today is still the cross. And to a degree, few would argue. Yet it must be asked, once the cross is believed and salvation by grace through faith occurs, does the Lord and God of heaven sit down and do nothing in our lives? Does God's working stop when we believe in His Son Jesus Christ?

"For it is God which worketh (energeo) in you both to will and to do of [his] good pleasure." **Philippians 2:13**

That key word *operation* that we discovered in Colossians 2 introduced yet another truth about God. To operate, as it says, is to "effectually work." We find that it's used in Ephesians 3:7 and 4:16 as "effectually working." How can God's energy be effective if it is not constant or ever present? To conclude that He Himself, while silent in words, cannot work is to imply that He has no more energy for the task at hand. And what IS the task at hand?

"For this [is] good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior; who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth." **I Timothy 2:3-4**

In order for this to be true and for God to "will and to do" His good pleasure, He must continue operating. Take a look at the operating table of God in the past tense:

"Grace [be] to you and peace from God the Father, and [from] our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father:" **Galatians 1:4**

"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." **Galatians 2:20**

*"Christ hath **redeemed** us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed [is] every one that hangeth on a tree:" Galatians 3:13*

*"But when the fullness of the time was come, **God sent** forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law," Galatians 4:4*

*"Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith **Christ hath made us free**, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage." Galatians 5:1*

Our glorious and honorable God loved us, sent His Son Jesus Christ, gave Himself for us, redeemed us, and made us free. But it gets better.

*"According as **He hath chosen us** in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:" Ephesians 1:4*

*"**Having predestinated us** unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of His will," Ephesians 1:5*

*"To the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein **he hath made us accepted** in the beloved." Ephesians 1:6*

*"And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as **God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.**" Ephesians 4:32*

While Ephesians tells us that He chose us, predestined us, accepted us, and forgave us, we're still left sitting on the sideline of the present age asking, "But what about now?" Perhaps some quickly jump to the ultimate lingering question, "What else do you have for me, God?" I implore you to pause for a moment, go back, and read through the passages above. Although it is true that there is a very present God that we'll see momentarily, it's invaluable that one not forget the Lord's most famous answer to Paul's prayer:

"And he said unto me, 'My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.' Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." II Corinthians 12:9

We will, of course, capture the depths of grace in a few pages, but at the present time (pardon the pun), we're dealing with how God *works*. And before one can really consider what God is doing today, it must first be trusted that He finished something in the past. To encapsulate the earlier passages, our God loved us, sent Himself, gave Himself, redeemed us, forgave us, and made us free. If that doesn't stop your heart to skip a beat, then you didn't read it all. Go read it again.

Having pointed to a God whose energy was heavily driven into a *past* event, does He do anything today? Certainly one must immediately draw out the absurdity of my question. How are any of us saved if all that God did rested in the past? Did He not awaken our spirits to the truth? Did He not turn the light on in our darkened hearts? Did He not make us alive when we were dead? Who among us can credit ourselves with having been the "saving power" that pointed someone to Christ?

Surely if any of us are saved at all, God had His hand in making it happen, did He not? Or do we really theorize that we achieved salvation through our own righteous and knowledgeable means?

These are, for arguments' sake, just rationalized arguments in favor of a presently working God. Indeed they may be logical, but man's common sense is not superior to God's Word. Thus, we find ourselves begging the question of God exerting Himself in the *present* tense.

"The Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus; for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain:" II Timothy 1:16

"The Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day: and in how many things he ministered unto me at Ephesus, thou knowest very well." II Timothy 1:18

"Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things." II Timothy 2:7

"And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve [me] unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom [be] glory for ever and ever. Amen." II Timothy 4:18

Give, grant, and deliver are present and future tense operations. To grant is to give what need not be paid back. Call it an added bonus for many of our college students who quickly snatch it up over extended loans. But some skeptics may now be asking themselves, "Is this all?" Surely we all know that we shall be delivered from any future wrath. Surely we all know that God gives us understanding in His Word. Surely we all know that He grants us mercy. But wait... do we really grasp this particular mercy? Take a look back.

"The Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus; for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain:" II Timothy 1:16

We generally deem "mercy" as the gift of salvation, but we also recently introduced the notion of abundant mercy that stretches beyond what we can think or imagine. Since when does mercy end at the cross?

"Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labor, and fellow soldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants. For he longed after you all, and was full of heaviness, because that ye had heard that he had been sick. For indeed he was sick nigh unto death: but God had mercy on him; and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. I sent him therefore the more carefully, that, when ye see him again, ye may rejoice, and that I may be the less sorrowful." Philippians 2:25-27

At a time when Paul is writing to Timothy to drink "a little wine" as a means to good health with his stomach ailment (I Timothy 5:23), most dispensational believers come to discover in their studies that this was a point when the "signs" of healing had begun to depart. And by every measurable standard, they really were disappearing. Who, then, is left to heal a man sick unto death but God Himself?

This, my friends, is the reason we find ourselves still praying for those in need. We are no longer granted a supernatural power to reach out and touch their health ailment and heal it, "but God"

(remember that awesome and powerful two-word phrase) is beyond our realm of expectation. God's mercy extends beyond the cross and reaches into the specific needs of His people.

"But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Jesus Christ."

Philippians 4:19

Our God is an ever-working, full-time Savior. Our prayers are valuable because they matter to the Almighty. When you encounter a believer who insists that God no longer works in this present age, ask them for the Biblical account of His vacation schedule. Although there is great caution that must be exercised with regard to a "working God" belief system (not rushing to put His signature on every event or claiming that He "must" have done something in particular), we can be confident that He has not left us to wander alone. Never late, never early, our God is always there.

"Now unto him that is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us," **Ephesians 3:20**

COURTROOM OF FORGIVENESS

In 1973, *Tony Orlando and the Dawn* experienced their greatest success with a song entitled, "Tie a Yellow Ribbon Round the Ole Oak Tree." For those who remember this disco age, it told the story of a man released from prison (or Vietnam, depending on who tells the tale) to return home. Unsure whether his loved one was willing to let him return, he wrote her a letter asking that she "tie a yellow ribbon" around the oak tree if she still wants him after three years of separation. If he nears the house and doesn't see the ribbon, he'll stay on the bus and keep on going. Of course, he arrives to the humbling discovery that there are "one hundred ribbons" tied out front.²

By 2005, the number of American prisoners released from state or federal jurisdiction reached just under 700,000. While that number is greater than the entire population of Baltimore (not including the suburbs) and near equivalent to the city of San Francisco, ex-cons face a daunting challenge of how to emerge back into the workplace. Right now, according to a survey of five large cities in America, sixty-five percent of employers will not knowingly hire convicted felons after they've done their time.³ Even now, some of you are reading this and asking yourselves if 700,000 is an accurate number. Isn't that just a little high? Are they really out there roaming our streets?

"As far as the east is from the west, [so] far hath he removed our transgressions from us."

Psalm 103:12

"East and west" have long carried with them a series of different meanings. Someone might use them as reference to the ideology of "the west" vs. the ideology of "the east." Many speak of religion by separating Islam (east) from Christianity (west) and indicating that they are so far from one another that it is near impossible to find a common ground. Still others equate east and west to the Hebrew division of Ephraim (west) and Judah (east). But more than likely, you saw Psalm 103 and simply thought, "East can never touch west because they are inherently different directions." On all accounts, the point is there to be made.

Whether we're speaking about the distance between north and south or between hot and cold, there is no measure. One is so far from the other that they have no relationship and no connection. Paul goes on to use David's words in his doctrine of forgiveness:

"Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, [saying], Blessed [are] they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed [is] the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." **Romans 4:6-8**

Up to this point in our efforts to find God's glorious grace, we have encountered His care, His compassion, and His depths of mercy. But we were, in a sense, the convicted felons awaiting our punishment for sin. When He walked into the courtroom, our view of Him offered a glimpse of hope, but we still knew our condition and we surely knew what was deserved. In that moment, we became silent awaiting the sentence. The courtroom grew quiet. He could lay down the penalty or immediately pass judgment, but in His kindness, in His meekness, and in His gentleness, He said, "You're forgiven."

"And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." **Ephesians 4:32**

Angelic crowds erupted on both sides. There were those who rejoiced at the mercy of God in your forgiveness and there were those who now stood to prove that you still deserved punishment.

"For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high [places]." **Ephesians 6:12**

The battle now rages between the "powers that be" on behalf of your forgiveness. Yet there you stood with eyes locked on the King eternal. Thoughts raced through your mind. You had been released. You were free to go. Yet, as you turned to walk away with tear-filled eyes, He reached out with His scarred hands to say that He is the reason you are free. And there, in the courtroom of forgiveness, you were introduced to the meaning of God's grace.

THE ACADEMICS OF GRACE

On a heartbreaking night of waiting for the test results, Carol and her husband were longing to find out if indeed their daughter had Leukemia. When the doctor arrived in the lobby, his head did not droop low, but these parents were brave enough to recognize the sorrow in his eyes as he prepared to speak. It was true. Twelve-year-old Cynthia was very much in need of a blood transfusion if she was to have any chance of survival.

Each member of the family was tested for the proper blood type until it was found that just one had a match. Little Matthew, who was only eight years old, was healthy enough to at least temporarily strengthen the life of his sister. Yet, Matthew's mother and father were unsure of how to relay the necessity of the situation. After all, he was just a little boy and the gravity of his older sister's ordeal was quite over his head. So they sat down with him and did their best to explain what was going on. After having a little while to "think it over," the boy walked up to his father, took his hand, and said, "I'll do it."

Within the hour, Matthew was lying on his side in a hospital bed with a needle attached to his vein. The nurses were attempting to entertain him, but his focus was attentive on the task at hand. When the doctor arrived to begin the process of taking Matthew's blood, he rolled up a chair and made sure that his young patient was comfortable. As the fluid moved into the appropriate bag, the boy's eyes caught a glimpse of what was happening. With his other arm, he tugged at the doctor's sleeve. "Sir, when will I begin to die?" The nearby nurses quickly turned to see the doctor whispering a sweet assurance, "Matthew, you're not going to die."

The importance of understanding the things we do or the things we believe is essential. Certainly no one would condemn little Matthew for his good nature and willingness to lay down his life for Cynthia, but we gasp to think that he made his decision without knowing that it was easier than he originally thought it would be. Understanding grace ought to be just as simple.

"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: [it is] the gift of God:"
Ephesians 2:8

By "grace" are we saved. The word grace stems from the Greek word, *charis*, which means "giving what is undeserved." Scholars can find strong debate in the notion that *charis* led us to develop our word, *charity*. As we all know, charity implies the giving of ourselves or our finances to those who have done nothing to deserve our attention.

Much to the surprise of many Biblical students, *charis* is built upon something even more amazing than just our simplistic notions of grace itself. For it is grace built upon *chara*, or "joy" and "gladness."

"Now the God of hope fill you with all joy (chara) and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost." **Romans 15:13**

"Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy (chara): for by faith ye stand." **II Corinthians 1:24**

"Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness (chara); and hold such in reputation:"
Philippians 2:29

Both *charis* and *chara* are nouns. What this teaches is grace as the gift of God beyond the action of His mercy or forgiveness.

"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: [it is] the gift of God:"
Ephesians 2:8

Our God and King eternal is full of gifts. And surely we know this to be true by how much He abounds in the riches of His glory. He has so much to give and the creation thus becomes a recipient of all that He desires to provide.

We should also find it fascinating to consider that other words in our modern world have been built from the Greek word of grace. *Charisma* is found 17 times in the New Testament and translates as a "gift" or "free gift." We recognize it today as a charming attribute of powerful leaders. Of course, from *charisma* is the easily recognizable *charismatic* way of thinking. Those who are

charismatic tend to lean on the extreme of needing some level of ecstatic or supernatural experience in order to maintain their weekly faith.

The Catholic *Eucharist*, as you may not have seen it before, stems from the belief in a spiritual communion with God. Conceiving that He has given so much, the *eucharist* (lower case) follows that man is to graciously give thanks in return by partaking of the body and blood of the Savior. Theological battles raged from the days of John Wycliffe as to whether the bread and the wine were translated into the body and blood of Christ (transubstantiation), but it was Martin Luther who re-introduced believers to the truth that we partake in communion "in remembrance" of the price that He paid on the cross for our sins.

In classic Greek mythology, it was the goddess *Charis* who represented the personification of grace and beauty. Hence, it is here again that we find Paul taking what was familiar in the pagan world and demonstrating it as something much more powerful and much more significant through the inspiration of Almighty God. In the majestic doctrine of his Epistle to the Romans, Paul teaches grace by contrast to the law and so establishes a foundation of grace that cannot be earned.

"For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace."

Romans 6:14

"And if by grace, then [is it] no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if [it be] of works, then it is no more grace: otherwise work is no more work." **Romans 11:6**

Insistence is placed upon the message that God's grace cannot be merited through our works. Rather, His grace is a gift that stands alone without anyone's contribution or payment in hopes of receiving it. Just a moment ago, you saw that this is Paul laying a foundation. Let us be assured that it is indeed a solid ground upon which we may stand.

"According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon."

I Corinthians 3:10

Putting all this together we are able to then know with confidence that God's grace, above all else, is a gift given to the undeserving. Although its origin has grown into a variety of forms, grace itself is given with great joy by the King who is rich in mercy. Likened to the lesson on *methods*, the gift of His grace is not given with a backhand or a snide expectation. He dispenses grace with joy and we receive it re(joy)cing.

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."

Colossians 3:16

To find the glory of His grace is to have found joy in His gift. For many, this is a daily treasure that inspires them forward. For others, this is a forgotten truth in the midst of force-fed doctrine. But if we do not remember grace and discover the joy underneath its wrapping, then there is little glory in the gift. Remember, for something to be glorious, it must be at its highest level. Thus, the glory of God's grace is found in the exultation of what we have been given. May we not

forget that as one body, each member must help the other to find their joy in Christ (II Corinthians 1:24).

ADVANCEMENT OF GRACE

At the close of each morning service, our church fellowship often ends with the resonating voices of men and women singing *Amazing Grace*. After more than a year in the sheltered friendship of these brothers and sisters who love my wife and I so faithfully, the lyrics of *Grace* have more recently stirred my heart to remember another time and another place. While many picture images of the cross, the love of our Savior, or the blessing of heavenly hope, I find myself thinking of this thing we've come to call a *Grace Movement*.

In the fall of 1997, among the hills of northwest Oregon, I was introduced to a patient man whose knowledge in the Word managed to humble my adolescent urgency for correctness. From that season through to the winter of 1998, he taught me the principles of critical thinking when it came to proper handling of the Scriptures. At times, my questions insisted that we find a quick answer and he would more greatly insist that we had plenty of time. Rather than rushing to know, his instruction set me on a self-controlled path to *rightly dividing the word of truth*.⁴

During the time that I shared in his company, we took root in a small fellowship near his home. The church, as it became known to me, was a "grace church." Although it struck me that this was a small assembly of less than thirty men and women, I was captured by the teaching and the consistently clear messages from the Word of God. Having long been attracted to large youth groups and mega churches because of how they made me feel, this was a new experience altogether.

As *grace* teaching ripened my muddled mind, it became my greatest passion to "get the message out there" for those who were gathered elsewhere. The home where we had been gathering for Monday night studies became a house for many youth and college age kids that I knew and loved dearly. There they were, young people beyond myself, learning the Scriptures and coming to understand the Word rightly divided. The grace message was getting out and youth were getting as excited to learn more as I was. But that came to a shattering halt almost as quickly as it had begun.

What I did not know at the time was that while the "message" was solid, the people who taught it were fractured all across the nation. In our situation, my faithful teacher was made an outcast in the assembly because the students he brought each Sunday morning were beginning to outnumber the more Biblically seasoned adults. He was perceived as a threat to the leadership and thus, a church of less than thirty became a church of less than fifteen almost overnight. Many of the young people who were eager to learn lost all desire to stick around. This was, as many might identify, my first experience with the *Grace Movement*. And as it turned out, this was happening all across the country.

When faced with the discouragement of arrogant grace, I knew nothing of the men who had faithfully pioneered this movement in the 1930s. What I did know was that a message of hope suddenly became a message of rejection. And more striking than anything else, my generation of rising adults were not welcome.

For the next three years, I committed myself to isolated study and to the visiting of churches in state after state from Oregon to New Jersey and in-between. That journey afforded me the privilege of shaking hands and sharing meals with many noble teachers such as Roger Anderson, former President of the *Grace Gospel Fellowship*, and Joel McGarvey, the current Associate Director of *Bible Doctrines to Live By*. One visit to Passaic, New Jersey put me in the wonderful association of an African-American grace assembly ministering to the struggling neighborhoods of their community.

Yet, for every blessed fellowship that I entered, it was discovered that they had endured their share of hardship. And for every hardship, I found more and more churches filled with broken and angry people. At times, it was possible for me to get up around 6am on a Sunday morning, drive about 3 hours one-way to visit a body of believers, and upon my departure around lunch, realize that absolutely no one had noticed my being there. Granted, I am not much to look at, but the warmth of a welcoming assembly was not evident. If the doors merely open and close long enough to get a Bible lesson and no one genuinely interacts, what has been accomplished?

In his much applauded book, *The Grace Awakening*, Chuck Swindoll's cover page engraves the words, "Believing in grace is one thing. Living it is another." And quite remarkably, many within our arguably fading movement prefer to condemn Swindoll for his ignorance of dispensational matters rather than to consider such simple words. Is it not true that believing in grace is only one side of the coin while living it is quite another?

At the opening of each epistle, the Apostle Paul begins and ends on the most frequently overlooked salutation.

*"To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called [to be] saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." **Romans 1:7***

*"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ [be] with you all. Amen." **Romans 16:24***

This, for Paul, is neither casual nor random. He does not proceed to jump-start his writing with exclamatory frustrations or hard-hitting doctrine. It is his intention to convey from the Lord Jesus Christ just one key thing where all others may be occasional. Grace to you and grace be with you. How many letters or emails have you written to a brother or sister in the Lord where you set aside salutation in order to attack them as an enemy or pound them with doctrine? Notice that Paul never once allows the grace approach to slip his mind.

No doubt some heavy critics read this and say, "Yes, but we must understand the doctrine of grace. It is not sufficient to be gracious if we don't understand what grace means." My dear friends, what longsuffering slave did not learn over time what it meant when his master raised the whip? Believers after believers have approached me during the past ten years to tell me that they are exhausted from the charts, the timelines, and the displays of a redundant and repetitious theme that no longer has uniqueness. They can even be found saying, "I'm sick of hearing about grace!" Some of you read that exclamation and gasp at the thought. How could anyone be sick of hearing about grace?

The answer is simple: People within the *Grace Movement* have become "sick" of hearing about grace because it is continually taught to them as though they are hearing it for the first time or even worse, competent adults are being taught as though they were mere children. When anyone is taught the same message over and over or given no credibility for intelligent thought, the message loses his "saltiness."

*"Let your speech [be] always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man." **Colossians 4:6***

Our little ones learn the basics of early addition, but they will make no further progress if the same basics are all that they ever learn. Successful education takes mathematics and continues to build from a common foundation. The challenge our leaders have within this movement is not to continue finding ways to repeat or regurgitate the same information, but how they will begin to teach their assemblies and their congregations about walking worthy of the grace that they've been called

(Ephesians 4:1).

Our young people are facing some of the toughest worldviews and secular challenges that they've ever had to face in this culture. What will I do if I get caught up in an extra-marital relationship? What if I get pregnant? Are people born homosexual?

You see, our children in grace are being raised up to know the academics of grace, but are not being raised up to face the dangers that await them from Monday through Saturday. Instead, we train them to know the *Book of Acts* by age 10 and then throw them to the wolves where the world eats them alive by age 16. Faced with drugs, depression, suicidal tendencies, atheism, they buckle under the weight of such vast tribulation because we've done nothing to prepare them. When a girl that we once knew in our assembly shows up pregnant, we're devastated. When a boy once trained by our teachers claims that he no longer believes in God, we're stunned. But these losses fall on those of us who have been careless enough to ignore their needs during the critical period of their most vulnerable age. Seeking to feed our adult minds with witty debates, we lose sight of the most important group in our midst.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, our responsibility is clear, but easily overlooked. If we do not make provisions for the children and realize the battles that they face, we will lose them and thus lose ourselves. We must give them something to sing about. We must give them a reason to rejoice. Perhaps that means we must first find our own reason to sing. Perhaps that means we must first realize what it is to have joy.

Quite possibly standing alone in these words, I must concede that we are nothing of a movement if we are not moving forward and we are nothing of grace if we are not gracious in our movement. Either we must put an end to our ministries as they bear no fruit to the next generation or we must evaluate our motions and upon finding that we have cause to proceed, let our conviction be to the *advancement* of grace.

The time is now. Let us no longer just move... but move forward.

THE CROWNING TOUCH

We stand in an embrace of the eternal King who has given much more than any part of creation could or would have expected. In the *Riches of His Glory*, we were humbled by His design. In the *Peace that Passeth All*, we will be confident of His love. Yet in this moment, take time to reflect on the *Glory of His Grace*. He has exceeded all expectation and continues to amaze.

He meets us where we are.

He is full of compassion.

His mercy is great.

His mercy runs deep.

He offers hope in His presence.

He is patient.

He is enduring.

He is forbearing.

He will suffer long on our behalf.

He is slow to anger.

He is meek.

He is gentle.

He is kind.

He is working.

He is operating.

He is giving.

He has accepted us.

He has forgiven us.

He has delivered us.

He covers us.

He can do abundantly above all that we ask or think.

He fills us with joy.

He is full of grace.

He has sent His Son and His Son has set us free.

By grace are we saved through faith. Amen.

PART THREE



PEACE THAT PASSETH ALL
(Philippians 4:7-9)

WEARY SOLES

Under the towering heights of Cambridge University in 1580, residents could sometimes hear the early morning faintness of four footsteps and three voices. Newly elected professor, John Bois, had in the same year contracted the smallpox virus and was frequently carried to his office in the throws of blankets by two well-respected tutors.¹ Faithful men as they were, the common thought among us all is to ask why in the world Mr. Bois would not just resign himself to the comfort of a warm bed and a cup of hot tea. Had he chosen to stay home in the midst of illness or trial, surely no one would have thought him the lesser.

Truth be told, there are still men like Bois in our midst today. Over the past year, I've counted it a privilege to know and cherish some dear brothers in Christ who drive from home to home and church to church in an effort to build up other believers in the faith. Still others I've learned will read Scriptures deep into the night while standing up in order to keep themselves awake. Perhaps with such a vast population, these men and women are not so obvious, but there are many who labor in Christ without rest at the risk of their own health.

Be that as it may, not all of us are so tireless in our studies or our efforts to teach. Some of us maintain the necessities of a challenging family life or work between two and three jobs just to maintain the mortgage. Quite often, the echoes of a modern Bois can be found in the sound of early morning shovels hitting the pavement after a blizzard. Whether we're rearing our children, stacking chairs in an auditorium, or laying concrete and building shelves, the nature of "burning the midnight oil" is to work at the expense of our rest. And for whatever reasons compel us, it is true that many would be willing in the midst of illness to have a dear friend carry them to work if it meant that they could continue their labor to its necessary end.

To a few (and perhaps even an unexpected many), the reverse is true. For while they will indeed labor diligently, they also recognize what it means to find rest. After many discussions and endless reading, I've sometimes found myself nestled in the softness of my wife's touch wondering why I don't embrace those moments more frequently. For it is in those moments that I find myself saying, "I'm tired. I've said all I can say. I've done all I can do. I've pondered over all I can read. No more. It's time to rest." And no matter how often I disappear into an office of diligence, her loving and equally diligent arms are always there.

When faced with the unlikely possibility of finding land, Noah sent out a raven and a dove that they might survey the earth as far as their wings could carry them.

*"But the dove found no rest for the sole of her foot, and she returned unto him into the ark, for the waters [were] on the face of the whole earth: then he put forth his hand, and took her, and pulled her in unto him into the ark." **Genesis 8:9***

For the precious dove that flew endlessly over the waters with no hope in sight and "no rest for the sole of her foot," there was one place that she knew was safe. There was just one place she knew would welcome her home. And when she returned to Noah after her tiring journey, his hand was stretched out, he took her weary body, and lovingly pulled her "in unto him" where she could rest.

The King eternal and Lord God Almighty stepped out into the world of man's shame and offered a voice of hope (Genesis 3:8-9). He extended patience and tolerance, expressed his deep mercy, proved that He was slow to anger, and gave the gift of His glorious grace. Yet, in the midst of all this, our human tendency is to set up a wall of doubt. Is there really "rest" in such a powerful God and King? How can I really trust in His amazing grace?

To those who are weary, to those who labor, to those who face the night as though it were still day, to those who never stop... may you know that His extended hand always offers rest. Though you may not pause in this life without the straps of an ambulance gurney, His rest is nevertheless yours to apprehend. I hope and pray this study leads you to a peace that passeth all.

A FAITHFUL WITNESS

At the feet of a Roman governor fell the body of a man who had been asked to answer the most important question of his life. Attempting to root out the plague of Christianity from the empire, Sanctus was asked about his residence and his profession of faith. Speaking in Latin, he said, 'I am a Christian.' "For this he confessed instead of his name, his city, his race, and instead of every thing." Those standing next to the consul "fastened red hot plates of brass to the most tender parts of his body" and over the next few hours, his mangled flesh had "lost the form of man to the external eye." Yet, in the final hours of the day when his tormentors supposed that he would be subdued, Sanctus raised himself up and stood tall "through the grace of Christ."²

Deep within his pain, Sanctus knew the following words of Paul were the inspired words of God to his spirit:

"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time [are] not worthy [to be compared] with the glory which shall be revealed in us." **Romans 8:18**

Few men in history have been willing to let their lives be taken unless the cause was of a greater purpose than themselves. Those who went on to be executed for their Christian faith in the first few centuries after the life of Christ were known as martyrs.

"But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee." **Acts 26:16**

The Apostle Paul was made a "witness" of things that he had seen and would see. That word "witness" was the Greek word *martys*, from which it quickly evolved. As the emperors and governors of Rome became more and more concerned about the rise of Christianity, these witnesses of the truth would face a multitude of torturous offenses. Some were fed to the lions in the amphitheater as an audience cheered. One such believer by the name of Pothinus had passed his 90th year and was already on the verge of death when he was "unmercifully dragged" before a crowd of people who "abused him with their hands and feet in every possible way, not even regarding his age."³ The word of *martyr* (or *martyrdom*) was soon applied as a title of honor for those who bravely accepted death instead of renouncing their faith.⁴ However, there were many whose witness could not be relied.

"At my first answer no man stood with me, but all [men] forsook me: [I pray God] that it may not be laid to their charge." **II Timothy 4:16**

At the end of his life, Paul stood nearly alone in the faith and very few were willing to stand beside him. Among those who remained were Luke and Mark, writers of two gospel stories (II Timothy 4:11). For those of us who so often depend on others to keep us from feeling as though our

efforts have failed, a most important question rises to the surface. If man cannot be depended on as a faithful witness, then who can be trusted to stand in our defense?

"For God is my witness (martys), whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers;" **Romans 1:9**

*"Moreover I call God for a record (martys) upon my soul, that to spare you I came not as yet unto Corinth." **II Corinthians 1:23***

*"For God is my record (martys), how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ." **Philippians 1:8***

*"For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloke of covetousness; God is witness (martys):" **I Thessalonians 2:5***

*"Ye are witnesses (martys), and God [also], how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe:" **I Thessalonians 2:10***

All human witness is temporary and somewhat unsure. As so many of us may recall, it was Peter who declared firmly that he would never deny Christ even to the point of a threatening death.

*"Peter said unto Him (Jesus), Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples." **Matthew 26:35***

Peter's own confession of faith was easy when he stood before Jesus. It was not, however, as easy when faced with the threat of death.

*"Then began he to curse and to swear, [saying], I know not the man. And immediately the cock crew." **Matthew 26:74***

Here we return to the ultimate lesson in our own mortality. Not everyone is willing to give up his life for Christ. As some might say, we can talk a good talk, but can't walk a good walk. Even the most faithful man is vulnerable to his own fear of experiencing death. It is therefore of utmost importance that we recognize this shortcoming and acknowledge a faithfulness that is beyond the scope of our full understanding.

*"God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord." **I Corinthians 1:9***

*"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God [is] faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear [it]." **I Corinthians 10:13***

*"Faithful [is] he that calleth you, who also will do [it]." **I Thessalonians 5:24***

*"But the Lord is faithful, who shall establish you, and keep [you] from evil." **II Thessalonians 3:3***

These Scriptures should, I would hope, bring a smile to your face and a warmth to your heart. By now we know that our God is eternal, immortal, invisible, incorruptible, right, and true. Whatever He says is true and it is not within His being to fail or give up on us. He is worthy of our trust. Others may turn away from us in our weakest moments, but when God says that He is faithful, we can rest in His Word.

GENTLEMEN'S AGREEMENT

The relationship between Japan and the United States was just beginning to make forward progress in 1906 when the local board of education in San Francisco took it upon themselves to segregate every Asian student into their own Oriental school. Facing pressure from all sides, President Teddy Roosevelt confronted the California legislature and moderated a reversal of their decision. At the same time, he reached across the sea to offer a "Gentlemen's Agreement" with Japan to calm the strained immigration process on American soil.⁵ This informal handshake meant that no paperwork had been signed, no rules had been set, and no one was capable of holding them accountable beyond themselves. In its ultimate sense, this was one man's word to the other. And in 1907, this was deemed a fair manner of business.

Not only have things changed today, but it can scarcely be heard that someone might say to another, "You have my word" or "Take my word of honor." Neither do we find anyone quoting the words made famous in 17th Century's *Don Quixote*, "My word is my bond." In fact, a great irony has replaced this phrase with a doubting listener who now asks, "Can I get that in writing?" We trust the written word over the spoken word because the latter does not offer us any visible assurance. And yet, many of us long for the days when the "gentlemen's handshake" might once again be employed in business.

Therefore, it should come as no surprise that we are baffled by the question of God's Word. A well-known pastor and teacher of God's grace has often told the story of his early days in college when he had laid out several Bibles across the floor in order to study out a subject. Each one was a different translation and it didn't strike him as odd until a friend entered the room and posed the question, "Which one is the Word of God?" If he answered affirmatively that they were all God's Word, then he might risk the obvious problem that in many ways, they were all very different. Hence the reason that he was laying them all out in the first place. This now led to an all-important series of questions that every faithful student of Scripture ought to investigate at some point in their studies.

Enough exhaustive teaching, both profitable and dangerous, is available on this subject with enough material to fill a small office. Regardless of one's ultimate conclusions, every effort to understand the Word of God more clearly requires a measure of faith. But lest we turn aside to controversy, a more important question stands in our path to understanding. If God's Word exists, which we all believe it does, then how can it be trusted? How can a man really "rest" in His Word when so many other words are thrown around like the wind?

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." **John 1:1**

This famously quoted passage from John equates the Word (Greek: *Logos*) with God Himself. If such prominence is given to the Word that we all study together and privately, then the same adjectives we attribute to the King would also apply. The Word is indeed eternal, it is incorruptible, it

is honorable, it is glorious, it is authoritative, and it is mighty. If it is all this and more, then the Word ought also to describe itself explicitly.

"Thy word [is] very pure: therefore thy servant loveth it." **Psalm 119:140**

"Thy word [is] true [from] the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments [endureth] for ever." **Psalm 119:160**

"Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him." **Proverbs 30:5**

"Sanctify them through thy truth, thy word is truth." **John 17:17**

"For the word of God [is] quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and [is] a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." **Hebrews 4:12**

"And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come," **Hebrews 6:5**

Recently a professor asked her students just what qualified the Word of God to speak for itself. In another sense, how can the Word of God be true simply because it says that it is true? Does that not go against the grain of common sense as though a poor man could speak up and say that he is the President of the United States? Who is to say that he is not unless there is a way to test his words with the actions that they produce?

"[As for] God, his way [is] perfect; the word of the Lord [is] tried: he [is] a buckler to all them that trust in him." **II Samuel 22:31, Psalm 18:30**

"The words of the Lord [are] pure words: [as] silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times." **Psalm 12:6**

Take any riddle, any story, any passage in its fullness and test it. From the beginning of Scripture to its end, examine it all and you shall find that it is always true. Every puzzle has its last piece in place. Every message of consequence is repeated so as not to be overlooked. Every chapter sings of His glory.

Gone are the days when every hand is extended with a "Gentlemen's Agreement," but present are the days when God's Word is extended with goodness, with purity, and with truth. In a time when there is little to trust and few who are faithful, lean on the Word of God for your answers and He will surely never let you down.

THE GOSPEL CONTRACT

Hardly a moment has gone by in the course of this series (from *Glory* to *Grace* and now to *Peace*) when it has not occurred to me that the gospel (good news) ought to receive its due attention. However, such an essential part of this series did not seem to fit most appropriately until confidence could be assigned to God's Word. For if indeed we have acknowledged that His Word is pure and true,

then we have also come to discover that His Word is good (Hebrews 6:5). And if we have encountered the good Word, then we must believe that there is good news within it.

Leaving theologians and scholars to wrangle over different gospel messages (Galatians 1:6-9), let us concern ourselves with one that is primary to everything we've covered to date. Quite simply, what is the gospel that saves?

"In whom ye also [trusted], after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise," **Ephesians 1:13**

In the beginning, our journey took us through the *Riches of His Glory* to find a King who was eternal, immortal, true, wise, honorable, and powerful. This was followed by a recognition that He stepped out of that high throne so that the *Glory of His Grace* could prove Him patient, slow to anger, forgiving, tolerant, merciful, and working on our behalf. But here we gather with, perhaps, an unclear picture of what EXACTLY has been done on our behalf and just what it is that constitutes the "gospel of salvation." For this, you are now invited to read of the greatest story ever told.

"And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his [own] image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them." **Genesis 1:26-27**

"And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, [it was] very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day." **Genesis 1:31**

"And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." **Genesis 2:16-17**

"And when the woman saw that the tree [was] good for food, and that it [was] pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make [one] wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they [were] naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons." **Genesis 3:6-7**

"And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where [art] thou?" **Genesis 3:9**

"And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever: Therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken." **Genesis 3:22-23**

"Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:" **Romans 5:12**

"And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that the days were accomplished that she

*should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn." **Luke 2:4-7***

*"And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcision of the child, his name was called Jesus, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb." **Luke 2:21***

*"This [is] a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief." **I Timothy 1:15***

*"Jesus therefore, knowing all things that should come upon him, went forth, and said unto them, Whom seek ye? They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus saith unto them, I am He. And Judas also, which betrayed him, stood with them." **John 18:4-5***

*"And when they had blindfolded him, they struck him on the face, and asked him, saying, Prophecy, who is it that smote thee?" **Luke 22:64***

*"Then Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged him. And the soldiers plaited a crown of thorns, and put it on his head, and they put on him a purple robe, and said, Hail, King of the Jews! and they smote him with their hands." **John 19:1-3***

*"And they smote him on the head with a reed, and did spit upon him, and bowing their knees worshiped him. And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple from him, and put his own clothes on him, and led him out to crucify him." **Mark 15:19-20***

*"And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. And the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst. And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost." **Luke 23:44-46***

*"He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were [our] faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he [was] wounded for our transgressions, [he was] bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace [was] upon him; and with his stripes we are healed." **Isaiah 53:3-5***

*"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." **Galatians 2:20***

*"And when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of sepulcher, and departed." **Matthew 27:59-60***

"And behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door and sat upon it... And the angel answered and said unto

*the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay." **Matthew 28:2,5-6***

*"Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." **Romans 6:4***

*"And hath raised [us] up together, and made [us] sit together in heavenly [places] in Christ Jesus:" **Ephesians 2:6***

*"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: [it is] the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." **Ephesians 2:8-9***

*"Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures." **I Corinthians 15:1-4***

*"And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power." **Colossians 2:10***

*"In whom ye also [trusted], after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise," **Ephesians 1:13***

*"Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, to whom be glory and honor forever. Amen." **I Timothy 1:17***

Ages of literature and religion have told countless tales of gods and men who never quite offer the hope that is so essential for humankind. One story may tout the glory of their god or the praise of their warriors, but in the end, every happy ending leaves room for a sequel of disappointment. Not the case with our King eternal. For He has given Himself as a ransom for all (I Timothy 2:6). Thus, to be a ransom is to exchange one life for another.

*"In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;" **Ephesians 1:7***

The price has been paid. We need only to believe and trust in the finished work of the cross. Our gospel contract has been signed through the blood of the King.

SHEDDING LOVE

Red eyes. Runny nose. Itchy skin. Signs of a common allergy known to many as the sweet, loving, four-legged household pet we've all come to call a cat. Visits to the home of my mother and father always warrant a little preventive medicine that rarely works. Both of their cats, even after being locked in the basement for the extent of our vacation, have already left enough of themselves all around the house that ten Claritin pills could never resolve my sniffles and tears. Evidence of their

presence is not always visible to the naked eye, but the proof of their footsteps is found in the shedding of dander and fur that sinks into every piece of furniture and ever fabric of the carpet.

A caterpillar may shed its skin. A tree may shed its leaves. A business may shed employees. The Son of God may even shed His own blood as we saw most powerfully in the last section. But there is another form of shedding that is important to our understanding of the King eternal. For in all the glory, all the mercy, and all the grace that we have seen, one most prominent factor of God's magnificent nature has not been addressed.

"For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, [and] hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost: Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior." Titus 3:3-6

"And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." Romans 5:5

Easily one of the most overused and misused words in the English language, love is the very nature of God (I John 4:8). Of all the words covered thus far, the nearest to compare is mercy. For if you will recall, mercy was an affection and compassion so deep that it was related to the bowels.

Likewise, love comes from a deep place, but it is not temporary or age-dependent. If God is love, then He is always love. But what exactly does that mean? Surely God is not love in the same sense that one may adore chocolate or quiet walks on the beach. Indeed there is a greater meaning.

In almost every case of God's love directed towards man, the Greek is *agape* (noun) or *agapao* (verb). The distinction of love as both a noun and a verb is significant for two reasons. First, it is a fixed condition; one that does not change (*agape*). Second, it is an action of kindness or charity (*agapao*).

"But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love (agape) wherewith he loved (agapao) us," Ephesians 2:4

Hence, because He is love, He loved. Nothing could be more explicit or evident in the prevailing theme of Scripture. God is love (*agape*) and therefore... He operates with love (*agapao*) in all that He does.

The other, much less used word of love in Scripture is *phileo* (think *Philadelphia* and the "City of Brotherly Love"). At its core, this is the kind of love that still has affection, but sets friendship (*philos*) as its mantle (Romans 12:10, I Thessalonians 4:9).

"And the Scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend (philos) of God." James 2:23

"If any man love (phileo) not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha." I Corinthians 16:22

Lest we deceive ourselves into believing that God's love is only shed in the form of *agape* and not *phileo*, let us return to the earlier passages.

"For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, [and] hating one another. But after that the kindness and love (philanthropos) of God our Savior toward man appeared, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost: Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior." Titus 3:3-6

"And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love (agape) of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." Romans 5:5

Not only does the Lord God of heaven and earth have mercy on you, but He loves you as an act of kindness, an act of goodwill, and an act of friendship. His amazing love took Christ to the cross and paid the highest price with "shed" blood. And in Christ, nothing can separate us from that love (Romans 8:38-39).

Yet, technicalities have left many wrapped up in a false idea that God's love ends at the cross. Be assured, His love was laid on the line at the cross for your salvation, but His love is greater still.

"And to know the love (agape) of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God. Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us," Ephesians 3:20

"And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love (agape) one toward another, and toward all [men], even as we [do] toward you:" I Thessalonians 3:12

"And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love (agape) which is in Christ Jesus." I Timothy 1:14

If you've heard or read the gospel, if you've trusted that He is slow to anger, if you've found that He is gracious, then you have found His love and should know it goes deeper still. His blood was shed 2,000 years ago as the price of your life. His love was shed so that you, as His creation, might once again be brought into fellowship with the King.

THE FELLOWSHIP...

Startled by the alarm clock on a cool Sunday morning, many of us awake to the routine of service at our local church. An elder has requested that we arrive early to set up chairs or perhaps make coffee for old friends. Some of us are the recipients of this labor as we enter the doors of an assembly hoping to see a smile and find warmth from our pastor's gentle encouragement. When all is said and done, a few go out for lunch and the majority return to their privacy. By its very nature, we call this weekly encounter a time of "fellowship."

From Oxford to Harvard and every prestigious university in between, employed scholars of any consequence are usually granted the title of "Fellow." Depending on the academic structure, this can mean a variety of different things, but at its core, any university Fellow is a man or woman who receives unlimited access to the inner libraries and research offices. Even college students have been

known to receive word from the government that they are being granted a "fellowship" of financial support based on the condition of their academic status.

Depending on our experiences, we naturally stand to be a little bit confused about the meaning of fellowship. Is it a gathering of people? Is it a gift? Is it a prestigious right?

*"I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now;" **Philippians 1:3-5***

Paul speaks in remembrance of Philipian "fellowship" by bringing in the Greek word *koinonia*. Simply put, this is a remembrance of "joint participation" in a common cause.

*"Two [are] better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow; but woe to him [that is] alone when he falleth; for [he hath] not another to help him up." **Ecclesiastes 4:9-10***

In 1987, our nation rallied behind the rescue workers of Midland, Texas as they worked to lift "Baby Jessica" out of the well that she had fallen into. Such a little child could not alone be held accountable for falling, but she required the assistance of others to get back up. Likewise, Biblical *fellowship* stands on the truth of reconciliation for the common good.

At times, we may manufacture the environment for fellowship with Sunday morning coffee or an invitation to dinner, but the setting is not the fellowship. If a man is broken, fellowship will put him back together. If a woman has fallen, fellowship will seek to restore her. For all who are down, fellowship will find a way to pick them back up. Fellowship is edification.

*"That there should be no schism in the body; but [that] the members should have the same care for one another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it." **I Corinthians 12:25-26***

Sound Biblical fellowship recognizes this necessity of partnership. For when one partner falls and we do not help him get back up, what will happen when we fall? Likewise, if we do not rejoice when our partner is honored, who will rejoice when we are honored?

Our heaven-bound road was not intended to be lonely. The path may in fact be narrow, but this ought to bring us closer together, not rip us apart. And the closer you get to your partners and "fellows" in ministry, you'll want to make every effort to help them get up when they lose their footing.

...OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

More than one thousand years passed from the days of the Apostle Paul to the legendary night when Martin Luther posted his 95 Theses to the doors of Wittenberg Castle in Germany. Reformation had been brewing for little over a century when John Wycliffe first proposed that the common man should have access to the Word of God in his own language. The Catholic Church had long been reading and teaching Scripture in a Latin tongue that few could speak. For this reason, Wycliffe accused them of holding a "literary monopoly" on the Bible.⁶

Defending Catholic authority, Henry Knighton preached that "Christ had entrusted [the gospel] to clerics and doctors of the church, so that they might administer it conveniently to the laity, and to

lesser people." ⁷ Simply put, Knighton was declaring that the "common man" had no right to the Word of God. But he was foolishly in error.

Nearly every word of the New Testament was originally written in *Koine* Greek (from *koinonia*), or rather, the language of the common man. Scholars have gone so far as to say that certain variations of *Koine* Greek were considered to be the "language of the streets." ⁸ In the most basic terms, your New Testament was written for the everyday man to understand. But why?

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion (koinonia) of the Holy Ghost, [be] with you all. Amen." II Corinthians 13:14

God has reached down into the life of common, even illiterate men to declare the good news of salvation and to share His desire for our fellowship.

"If [there be] therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship (koinonia) of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies," Philippians 2:1

"And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with [him], that we may be also glorified together." Romans 8:17

The King eternal has brought us into a partnership. A fellowship and communion with the Holy Spirit. We are "joint-heirs with Christ." Thus, if we fall, He grieves.

"Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption." Ephesians 4:29-30

We "grieve" the Holy Spirit when our fellowship with one another fails to be edifying or gracious. The truth is, we've all seen the failure of the Body to reconcile. We've all seen the Body lash out at its very members as though they were no longer necessary. And this absence of fellowship (joint-ness) is what stirs the Holy Spirit to operate in quite the opposite fashion. When man doesn't hold up his end of the relationship, God does.

"Nevertheless God, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus; And not by his coming only, but by the consolation wherewith he was comforted in you, when he told us your earnest desire, your mourning, your fervent mind toward me; so that I rejoiced the more." II Corinthians 7:6-7

"Blessed [be] God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God." II Corinthians 1:3-4

Like a breeze passing through on a warm summer's day or the touch of love after a long week, our God is by nature a God of comfort. Where you endure heartache, He is there. Where you face hardship, He is there. The King sets Himself forth as the example of consolation that allows us to learn what must be done when we are in fellowship with one another.

"Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus:" **Romans 15:5**

If God is a God of consolation, then we must know and be sure that He is here to lessen our grief and lessen our sorrows.

"Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given [us] everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts, and establish you in every good word and work." **II Thessalonians 2:16-17**

"For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ. And whether we be afflicted, [it is] for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or whether we be comforted, [it is] for your consolation and salvation." **II Corinthians 1:5-6**

"Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then I am strong." **II Corinthians 12:10**

Every one of us have days that could use a warm embrace. Every one of us have days when we need comfort. And every one of us have days when we could use a friend. Setting aside all clichés that might otherwise dampen this message, the Lord God Almighty has established a "joint" relationship with you. When you need hope, He is your everlasting consolation. When you suffer, He is your comfort. When you are weak, He is your strength. You were created to have fellowship and communion (koinonia) with the Living God.

THE LIVING GOD

On a recent visit to the Naples Zoo, my wife and I were celebrating our fifth wedding anniversary and had high hopes of enjoying the pleasure of roaring lions, trained birds, and swinging monkeys. Unfortunately, we made our stop in the zoo on one of the hottest days of the summer. Leopards were resting on their trees, alligators were cooling themselves in the water, and only the ducks seemed eager for our attention. For the price of what should have been a great experience, the park was pretty lifeless.

Our word "zoo" comes from the Greek word, *zoon*, which means "a living being." Most frequently in the New Testament, *zoon* is translated as "beast," but there is an empowering verb that serves as the backbone of this lesser creature. The Greek word, *zao*, means "to live" or "living." We find it several times in the following context:

"And it shall come to pass, [that] in the place where it was said unto them, Ye [are] not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living (zao) God." **Romans 9:26**

"[Forasmuch as ye are] manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living (zao) God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshly tables of the heart." **II Corinthians 3:3**

"And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living (zao) God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in [them]; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." **II Corinthians 6:16**

"For they themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living (zao) and true God." **I Thessalonians 1:9**

"But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living (zao) God, the pillar and ground of the truth." **I Timothy 3:15**

"For therefore we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living (zao) God, who is the Savior of all men, specially of those that believe." **I Timothy 4:10**

"Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living (zao) God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy;" **I Timothy 6:17**

From the earliest of times, we learn that everything alive must also have breath. Apart from oxygen (a compound word that builds from -gen or genes, "that which produces"), there is no life. Several years ago, *Avalon* sang these words to a melodic verse:

"I take each breath as if it is my first
I hold it there, so deep inside me till I'm about to burst
I speak each word as if it is Your name
I move my lips, I see the whisper stir the gentle flame
Your heart beats and so does mine
Your love moves and I know I'm alive
You are my oxygen
I breath you in, I breath you out."

All life and breath comes from God. Hardly a believer in the cross of Christ can pretend that he gave himself his own breath or that he gave himself his own life. We find it easy to conceive of the truth that God "breathed" His Word (i.e. "inspired") in II Timothy 3:16-17, but so often we fail to acknowledge that our very life is Christ because He is not merely a Living God, but He is a Living God IN us.

"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself up for me." **Galatians 2:20**

Going to back to the beginning, the most simplistic message is given to enhance our understanding of this truth.

"And the Lord God formed man [of] the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." **Genesis 2:7**

The breath of life comes from God. Thus, every breath we take is a gift. Every breath we take belongs to Him. Every breath we take has its source in the Living and "breathing" God.

"The Spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life." Job 33:4

Without a doubt we can be confident that God did indeed "breathe" His Word into our world so that we might have the understanding, knowledge, and truth of who He is and what He has purposed. But before you had the reason to understand or the discernment to know truth, you were still His creation. From your mother's womb, He created you and gave you life.

"Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord." Psalm 150:6

If you've gotten this far, then you still have life. Stop reading for a moment and just praise the Lord.

PEACE, BE STILL

Exhausted from the crowds, Jesus took His disciples onto a boat and began to sail away from the shore with a small fleet of other ships (Mark 4:35-36). They had hardly made headway before a "great storm of wind" began to strike fear into the hearts of these experienced fishermen. Fast asleep, Jesus was quietly at rest on a pillow. He awoke to the voices of doubt, but faced the wind with this most memorable line, "Peace, be still." Immediately the winds were brought to a calm and the seas became still. With one swift voice, the Lord illustrated not only His power over the wind, but His ultimate purpose of peace.

"Be still, and know that I [am] God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth." Psalm 46:10

In stories like the one above, we awe at the calming of winds and we laugh at the fear of the disciples. But peace is not so easily understood.

At age 43, Horatio Spafford looked on to see most of his real estate in flames during the Great Chicago Fire of 1871. Having just recently lost his son to a bout with Scarlet Fever, Spafford looked for an escape overseas with his wife and remaining four daughters. He sent his family on ahead in a trip that he would never forget. As though he was plagued with inevitable tragedy, all four of his daughters along with 222 other passengers drowned on November 2, 1873 in the wreckage of a two-ship collision. Spafford's wife survived the disaster and was able to send him a two-word telegram from Wales that simply said, "Saved alone." With "sorrows like sea billows," a broken father sailed across the Atlantic to look over the waters where his children had perished and pen these most famous lyrics, "It is Well with My Soul."⁹

Most of us who have endured trouble in life see the story of Horatio Spafford and humbly admit that we have not yet encountered anything by comparison. That he found "peace like a river attending to his way" is but a marvel to our hearts and a wonder to our minds. Would we stand in his shoes and weep curses to the Creator or would we fall to our knees and pour our sorrows before the King? Perhaps none can answer that question until they are face to face with such great loss, but it

remains the conclusion of this study to ask the most important question of all. Does the God of all strength, mercy, and patience offer peace for our lives today as He once did for the heroes of Scripture?

*"And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things [are] honest, whatsoever things [are] just, whatsoever things [are] pure, whatsoever things [are] lovely, whatsoever things [are] of good report; if [there be] any virtue, and if [there be] any praise, think on these things. Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you." **Philippians 4:7-9***

Every opening series that Paul uses for his epistles begins with "grace and peace." This is crucial. Surely the audiences that he writes are already believers in God's grace, so to open with such a word is not for doctrinal purposes, but for practical edification. Likewise, to offer "peace" with that grace is to speak of a condition of the spirit accessible to all believers.

*"Now the God of peace [be] with you all. Amen." **Romans 15:33***

*"Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you." **II Corinthians 13:11***

*"And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful." **Colossians 3:15***

Peace is, by Biblical standards, a stillness of the heart and mind. Based on the gospel, the faithfulness of the King, and the great patience of His mercy, we know that we have peace WITH God because He has bridged the gap that once kept us apart. But what of a daily peace?

*"Now the Lord of peace himself give you peace always by all means. The Lord [be] with you all." **II Thessalonians 3:16***

"By all means" reminds us that the Lord God Almighty has shown Himself compassionate, caring, and deeply loving. This is no less true of His desire for us to have daily peace. But how do we find it? How do we grab hold of this peace week after week and year after year?

*"Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and [that] the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" **I Corinthians 3:16***

*"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law." **Galatians 5:22***

If we have believed on the Lord Jesus Christ and His shed blood, the Spirit of the Living, True, and Faithful God dwelleth in us. If the Spirit dwells within us, then we have access to all that He is. We have access to love, access to joy, and access to peace. There is "no law" against these because they are boundless. Love is not limited to the cross or to life itself. Joy is not limited to salvation or a sweet melody. Neither is peace limited to a treaty or a beautiful mountainside.

To be sure, you will endure trouble in this life. At times, you may go through the unimaginable. At times, you may simply have a tough week. But in all and through all, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has given us His Spirit and through His Spirit we have the ability to rest in His peace. You may not know that peace is there to be enjoyed, but it is for you that I write. Close your eyes for a moment and consider all that you have inside by the handiwork of the King.

THE CROWNING TOUCH

From the *Riches of His Glory* to the *Glory of His Grace* and now to the *Peace that Passeth All*, no Biblical venture to date has ever given me such immeasurable comfort. Neither these words or the many volumes that could still be written would fully express what it has meant to dig deep into the wonder of God. Several occasions in writing have witnessed tears for no other reason than the simple fact that they needed to be shed. I count it a privilege to have shared this adventure with you and hope that in closing, you will be moved to peace by the power of the King.

He offers rest
He is faithful.
He is our witness.
He is our record.
His Word is pure.
His Word is true.
His Word is good.
He is full of good news.
His is the greatest story ever told.
He has shed His love on our behalf.
He wants our fellowship.
He offers comfort.
He offers everlasting consolation.
He is living.
He is the giver of life.
He is the God of peace.
His Spirit is within us.
And through His Spirit we have access to...
Boundless Love
Limitless Joy
...and...
Peace that Passeth All.

Let every one of us that hath breath, Praise the Lord!

Amen.

FOOTNOTES

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DEDICATIONS

This book is dedicated first and foremost to my father, Jim Lucas, who raised me to love the Lord and His Word above all else and all others. To this day, I still hold dear the fading words of June 7, 1984 that he wrote inside the cover of my first Bible: "This is the most important book you'll ever own. Guard it with love." With an integrity that I have never seen matched, he taught me to walk humbly, to walk boldly, and to walk faithfully before the Lord. In moments when my mind became a cloud of ignorance to my heart, his gentle love was always there to remind me of grace.

Secondly, but with no less admiration, this book is dedicated to three women whose amazing love for God has often been crushed by the destructive words of ignorant teachers. To my mother-in-law, Alice Cooley, who testifies of the gospel with a passion like none I have ever seen. To my sister-in-law, Abbie Nielsen, who saw the flaws of ungracious teaching and still lived by grace. To my loving and beautiful wife, Melissa Lucas, who teaches me diligence and patience when I am tired and weakened by frustrations.

Thirdly, these pages are dedicated to two men with whom I have weekly fellowship. To Troy Baker, a friend of friends who has given ear to my weaknesses and loved me regardless. Through our conversations, I found myself compelled to address a subject that many believers outside of the *grace movement* had tackled, but none within it. To Tony Pupo, a man whose enthusiasm to live a lifestyle of worship is a wonderful and encouraging reminder of our need to know the King eternal in all His glory.

Lastly, this dedication would be incomplete if I did not thank my pastor and friend, Glen Caneel. After traveling the country and visiting *grace* church after *grace* church, I had begun to wonder if my only fellowship with sound teachers would be purely academic. Through his friendship and our many generous discussions, I have been reminded of the next generation and the need for reaching our children with the gospel of grace. That message begins with the source of all, the King eternal.