

PART FIVE

GRACE AND GLORY

But glory is a difficult term to define. The Hebrew language has two words for it: *kabod*, which has the idea of “weight,” therefore of that which has value; and *shekinah*, which refers to the unapproachable light that surrounds and represents the Deity. In the New Testament, the word for glory is *doxa*, which is used to translate both Hebrew words and embraces both of the Hebrew ideas. All three words are chiefly used of God, as in Psalm 24, which describes God as the King of glory.

Lift up your heads, O you gates; lift them up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is He, this King of glory? The Lord Almighty – He is the King of glory. (Ps. 24:9-10).

(The psalm is teaching that God alone is of ultimate weight, worth, or value, and because of that, He only is worthy of our highest praise).

The problem with understanding *glory* comes when we realize that the word is also used in connection with our destiny, as in 1 Peter 5. Peter speaks of our being “called . . . to His eternal glory.” What does that mean? It could mean merely being called to God Himself, that is, to God’s presence. But when we look at other relevant Bible passages, we see that it means more than this. It means that we shall also share in God’s glory, that we shall be glorified. In other words, it does not refer only to where we will end up as Christians, but also to what we will be and how we will be received when we get there.

In my judgment, the most stimulating thing that has been written on glory is an essay by C. S. Lewis, titled “The Weight of Glory.” Quite possibly it is the best thing this brilliant English scholar and Christian apologist ever wrote. Lewis begins by admitting that for many years the idea of glory seemed unattractive to him because he associated it only with fame or luminosity. The first idea seemed wicked. Why should we want to be famous? Isn’t that un-Christian? And as for the second, well, who wants to go around looking like a high-powered electric light bulb?

However, as he looked into the matter, Lewis discovered that wanting to receive God’s approval was not at all wicked. He remembered how Jesus said that no one can enter heaven except as a child, and he reflected on how natural and proper it is for a child to be pleased when he or she is praised. There is a wrong way of desiring praise, of course. It occurs when we want praise to come to us rather than to someone else. (Moreover, it is always easy for a right desire for praise to flip over into a warped and evil desire and so be harmful). But pursued in the right way, pleasure at being praised is the exact opposite of the pride Lewis had at first thought it signified. It is actually humility of a childlike sort. Since God is our Father, it is right that we should want to please Him and be pleased at having pleased Him.

This is not due to anything in ourselves. Salvation is God’s work from start to finish. But what Lewis is saying is that for Christians the day will come when

we will stand before God, He having persevered with us until the end, and then He shall look upon us and be pleased with what He sees. He will say when He looks at us, "It has all been worthwhile. It was good for Me to have sent My Son to die on that cross, suffering the pain, agony, and torment of the crucifixion to save this sinner from his sins. He is what I wanted to make him. He is like My Son. I am satisfied. I am very well pleased." When we hear that, we will be well pleased, too. And, far from taking glory to ourselves for what has happened, we will glorify Him who has in that way glorified us.

Lewis says that the opposite of glory is to be ignored by God, to be rejected, exiled, and estranged. To be glorified is to be noticed, welcomed, received, acknowledged, and let in.

He has this encouragement, too:

If we take the imagery of Scripture seriously, if we believe that God will one day give us the Morning Star and cause us to put on the splendor of the sun, then we may surmise that both the ancient myths and the modern poetry, so false as history, may be very near the truth as prophecy. At present we are on the outside of the world, the wrong side of the door. We discern the freshness and purity of the morning, but they do not make us fresh and pure. We cannot mingle with the splendors we see. But all the leaves of the New Testament are rustling with the rumor that it will not always be so. Some day, God willing, we shall get in. When human souls have become as perfect in voluntary obedience as the inanimate creation is in its lifeless obedience, then they will put on its glory, or rather that greater glory of which Nature is only the first sketch.

The English hymn writer W. H. Burleigh thought so. He wrote:

Let us press on, in patient self-denial,
Accept the hardship, shrink not from the loss;
Our portion lies beyond the hour of trial,
Our crown beyond the cross.

And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. (2 Cor. 8:1).

The triumph is not in our own strength but by the grace of God. Sufficient grace? Yes, indeed. If we need sudden grace in some great catastrophe of life, God will supply sudden grace. If it is daily grace we need, God will provide grace day by day. If we need sustaining grace or persevering grace or overcoming grace, that is precisely what we shall have also.

You know how the great hymn "How Firm a Foundation" puts it:

When through the deep waters I call thee to go,
The rivers of sorrow shall not overflow,
For I will be with thee, thy trials to bless,
And sanctify to thee thy deepest distress.

When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,
My grace all-sufficient shall be thy supply;
The flame shall no hurt thee; I only design
Thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine.

E'en down to old age all My people shall prove
My sovereign, eternal, unchangeable love;
And when hoary hairs shall their temples adorn,
Like lambs they shall still in My bosom be borne.

In the midst of his sufferings Job said, "He knows the way that I take; when He has tested me, I will come forth as gold." (Job 23:10).

"And the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will Himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast." (1 Pet. 5:10). That verse tells us what God will do.

BENEDICTIONS

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. (Rom. 1:7)

The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you. (Rom. 16:20).

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Cor. 1:3).

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. (1 Cor. 16:23).

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Cor. 1:2).

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. (2 Cor. 13:14).

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Eph. 1:2).

Grace be with you all. (Heb. 13:25).

Grace and peace be yours in abundance. (1 Pet. 1:2).

Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. (2 Pet. 1:2).

Grace and peace to you from Him who is, and who was, and who is to come. (Rev. 1:4).

And the last one, our text:

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen. (Rev. 22:21).

These benedictions are most frequent in Paul's letters, but they are scattered throughout the New Testament and are abundant, several of them even appearing in a single book or letter. Frequently grace is linked with two other blessings that we have also received from God: mercy and peace. These are said to have come to us from God the Father and from or through the Lord Jesus Christ. Although the words appear in different combinations, the most complete form of these benedictions is the one found in 2 Corinthians 13:14: "May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all."

Paul told Timothy, "This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of them, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." (2 Tim. 1:9-10).

John 1:17 expressed this same truth simply, saying, "The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."

In the New International Version, there are only eight uses of the word *grace* in the Old Testament, but there are 128 uses of *grace* in the New Testament. In some cases, the word occurs several times in a single passage or chapter, as in the important chapter Romans 5. *Grace* occurs seven times in the last half of Romans 5 alone. The word also occurs extensively in Ephesians 1 and 2 and other passages.

We need to grow in the knowledge of God's grace.

Knowledge of the grace of God is not a static thing. Nothing in human life is. Therefore, we need to ask God that those we are concerned for might continually grow in that knowledge. Peter wrote, "Grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." (2 Pet. 3:18). We have an example of this in the case of Jesus, for it is written of Him: "And the Child grew and became strong; He was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon Him." (Luke 2:40). If you know Jesus as your Savior, you should never stop learning about Him and what He has done for you.

We need to exercise the gift for serving others that God has given each of us.

We do not often think of the grace of God and the gifts of God as belonging together necessarily, but it is significant that a number of Bible passages combine the two ideas. For example, Peter wrote that each Christian "should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms." (1 Pet. 4:10). In the same way, Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus, saying, "To each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it." (Eph. 4:7). Therefore, when we pray that "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with God's people," one thing we are praying for is that each might use the gift he has been given.

We need a continuing supply of grace in order to grow in grace and thus complete the work God assigns us.

Paul mentioned often how conscious he was of having received much grace to carry out his calling as an apostle. To the Romans: "Through Him and for His name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith." (Rom. 1:5); "By the grace given me I say to every one of you . . ." (Rom. 12:3); and ". . . because of the grace God gave me." (Rom. 15:15). To the Corinthians: "By the grace of God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder." (1 Cor. 3:10); and "By the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me." (1 Cor. 15:10). To the Ephesians: "I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of His power. Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." (Eph. 3:7-8).

Paul was also aware that God gave others grace to do the work to which he had appointed them. He told the Corinthians, "God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work." (2 Cor. 9:8). We should also have this truth in mind when we wish an abundance of "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ" upon others.

Grace is the great theme of the Bible from first to last. *Sola Gratia*.

"by grace alone," is the most fundamental affirmation of the Reformation and of all true evangelical Christianity. John Bunyan's great masterpiece of the spiritual life, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, tells the story of a man who set out from home carrying a great burden. Someone named Evangelist pointed him toward a celestial city shining in the distance. Along the way, the man lost his burden and, though there were many struggles and battles yet to come, he was sustained through them all by the unlimited love of God. The burden in the story is sin. The city of light is heaven. Before he left home, the man's name was Graceless. When his burden was lifted, his name became Christian. Christian's story is our story too. We are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone. And in that same grace we walk, step by step, toward that "city with foundations, whose architect and building is God." (Heb. 11:10).

If you were asked to sum up the Bible's entire message in just one word, which word would you choose? Reconciliation, salvation, justification, atonement, faith, love, eternity? All of these are wonderful words, but the word I would choose is *grace*. The very last verse in the Bible summarizes the message of Holy Scripture from Genesis to Revelation: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all." (Rev. 22:21, NKJV).

The word *grace* is found some 150 times in the New Testament alone. A quick look in any Bible concordance will show how "grace" is used to describe the most basic truths of the Christian faith. The God of the Bible is preeminently the God of grace (see 1 Pet. 5:10). Jesus came into the world "full of grace and truth." (John 1:14). The Holy Spirit is the "spirit of grace." (Zech. 12:10). God's throne is "the throne of grace." (Heb. 4:16). We receive forgiveness "in accordance with the riches of God's grace." (Eph. 1:7). We are chosen, justified, sanctified and one day we will be glorified all because of grace. Every Christian is called to be a good steward of the manifold grace of God. (See 1 Pet. 4:10). God's grace "brings salvation." (Titus 2:11). The good news we proclaim is the gospel of grace and if anyone preaches a different gospel, Paul does not hesitate to say, in the boldest language imaginable, that person should be eternally condemned. (See Gal. 1:6-9).

Grace is the great theme of the Bible, and it is also present in every act of Christian worship and devotion. We say "grace" at the table before we eat our meals. (Christian baptism celebrates the triumph of God's grace in bringing a lost man or woman out of the darkness of sin into the marvelous light of new life in Christ.) In the Lord's Supper, we remember God's gracious favor in sending Christ to be our Redeemer, even as we commune with Him through the power of the Holy Spirit and look forward to the marriage supper of the Lamb when, by

God's grace, we shall see the Savior face-to-face. Frequently our worship services are closed by a benediction extolling the triune God of grace and love.

But no hymn is more beloved than John Newton's "Amazing Grace! How Sweet the Sound." The son of a British shipmaster, Newton entered into naval service himself and became a slave trader. Amidst the perils of the sea, he was rescued from a life of despair and debauchery. Newton later became, along with William Wilberforce, a major force in the abolition of the slave trade. In looking back on his life, and the transformation that had occurred, he could account for this change only by appealing to the grace of God. He wrote;

Amazing Grace! how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.

What Grace Is

There are many definitions of grace, but one of my favorites is the one I first learned as a little boy in Sunday School: Grace is God's riches at Christ's Expense. We must not stumble over the simplicity of the phrase lest we also miss its profundity. It points to three elements which are essential in a biblical understanding of grace. First, grace originates with God. God initiates grace. As Paul said in Romans 9:16: "It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy." If any creature has any claim on grace whatsoever, it is solely because that grace has been given, bestowed, freely and undeservedly granted by God. Second, God's grace is inexhaustible, irrepressible, overflowing. God is not stingy. He is "rich in mercy." Paul said (Eph. 2:4). Once a violent persecutor of God's people, a converted Paul declared that "the grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly." (1 Tim. 1:14). When John Bunyan wrote his own spiritual autobiography, he picked up on this same theme calling his book Grace A bounding to the Chief of Sinners (see Rom. 5:20). One of the problems with the term "limited atonement" is that it suggest that something is missing or lacking in God's grace. Like cold drinks at a picnic, the supply has to be "limited" for fear that it might run out, that there might not be enough to go around! But this could not possibly be true for God's grace, for it is infinite and knows no such bounds. Finally, grace is God's riches - at Christ's expense. We should never think of grace apart from Jesus Christ. Jesus is the incarnate Son of God, the enfleshment of divine grace. This means that while grace is radically free, it is never cheap for it cost God the dearest thing He had - the sacrifice of His Son.

Oscar Hardman once wrote that the doctrine of grace "is profound in its nature, wide in its scope, comprehensive in its bearings, forbidding in its possession of a technical terminology, and confusing in the variety of the formulations which its successive exponents have given to it." Surely he is right! Even Paul, the great apostle of grace, often stretched the capacity of human language to its breaking point in describing the boundless love and grace of God. Right in the middle of his letter to the Ephesians, he interrupted his discussion of salvation by grace to conduct a prayer meeting. He actually fell on his knees and prayed to the Father. He asked that the Christians to whom he was writing would be able to grasp the extravagant dimensions of his subject. (Who can experience

its breadth, he asked? Or measure its length, or plumb its depths, or soar up to its heights? He wanted them to understand the full extent of God's grace, not just intellectually, but experientially. He wanted them "to know it, though it is beyond knowledge." (Eph. 3:18, NEB).

An eager student once asked St. Augustine what he thought God was doing before He made the world. To this question, the great theologian replied, with a twinkle in his eye perhaps, that God was busy creating hell for overly curious souls! Certainly there is much about the eternal decrees (the technical term for God's pre-temporal decision) about which we do not know and may never learn.

But from time to time throughout the Bible, God Himself pulls back the curtain of eternity and gives us a glimpse into the inner sanctum of His divine life in eternity past. For example, Jesus spoke of the intimate relationship He enjoyed with the Father "before the world began." (John 17:24). Jesus also declared that God had been preparing a kingdom for His elect children "from the foundation of the world." (Matt. 25:34, NKJV). Peter tells us that Christ was foreordained "before the creation of the world" to be a spotless sacrifice for sin. (1 Pet. 1:18-20).

John repeats this idea in Revelation 13:8, where he portrays Jesus as "the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world." Together these verses tell us that God saves men and women not on the basis of their merits, good works, or anything else they have done. He saves humankind in accordance with His predetermined plan, His gracious election, the central focus of which is Jesus Christ. Believers are predestined only "in Christ," never apart from Christ.

What God decided and planned to do before the creation of the world, He has in fact actually accomplished in time and space. The drama of redemption unfolds throughout the Bible from the first messianic prophecy in Genesis 3:14-19, all the way through the Old Testament to the anguished cry of Golgotha, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46, KJV). On the cross, Jesus bore the unmitigated penalty and damnation of sin and, standing in our place, satisfied the righteous demands of God's justice. "The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all," Isaiah said in prophetic foresight. (Isa. 53:6, KJV).

The meaning of the cross, and its power too, were released by Jesus' resurrection from the dead, followed by His ascension back to heaven, and His pouring forth of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. All of this is the result of God's grace, "his lavish gift-giving by the hand of His beloved son." (Eph. 1:6, *The Message*).

Lewis Smedes reminds us that we experience grace on different levels in our lives including these:

- We experience grace as *pardox*: God's forgiveness and justification removes our guilty standing before Him, our real guilt not just our guilty feelings. The psalmist claims that God's pardoning grace

removes our guilt of sin "as far as the east is from the west." (Ps. 103:12).

- We experience grace as joy. This delivers us from the frantic quest to be "happy" by stuffing our lives with fleeting pleasures and "joyrides" which leave us sadder and more depressed. Real joy comes from knowing and serving God.
- We experience grace as peace. God's *shalom* answers the anxieties and insecurities which threaten us. The standard New Testament greeting is "grace and peace." Grace and peace are twins; they belong together, related as cause and effect.
- We experience grace as power. Most people do not so much lack the knowledge as they do the ability to carry out what they already know is right. God's grace acts as an antidote to our impotence. It transforms, energizes, empowers.
- We experience grace as hope. But not in the loose sense of a vague general wish which may not come true, as in "hopefully it won't rain tomorrow." In Titus 2:11-13, Paul connected the grace of God with the "blessed hope" of Jesus' return in glory, a great motivation for confident Christian living.
- We experience grace as love. God's grace and love are so close that, at times, we cannot distinguish them. God's gracious love counters all of our nagging fears and doubts.
- We experience grace as gratitude. The most basic response we can make to grace remains a life of "thank you's."

But throughout history, God has had one and only one plan of salvation for everybody everywhere - by grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone! Old Testament saints saw only dimly and from afar what we now can look back upon and see clearly through the lenses of Calvary and Easter Sunday. But salvation was by grace for them no less than it is for us. In proclaiming this law-free gospel before the Council at Jerusalem, Peter declared that salvation was, as it always had been, by grace alone:

Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are. (Acts 15:10-11).

We cannot think of providence apart from Jesus Christ. Through Him, God made everything in heaven and on earth. (See John 1:3). He continually upholds the universe by the power of His word. (See Heb. 1:3). Jesus remains the eternal divine agent in both creation and providence. "In Him," Paul said, "all things hold together." (Col. 1:17). God has "put all things in subjection under His

feet." (Heb. 2:8, NKJV) and, amidst all the ambiguities of history, He is guiding the world and everything within it toward its divinely appointed end. So that ultimately "Jesus Christ is Lord" will be on the lips of every sentient being from heaven down to hell. (Phil. 2:5-10).

Martin Luther (1483-1546) was an Augustinian monk who, amidst many struggles, came to a new understanding of God, faith, and the church based on his study of the Holy Scriptures. The heart of Luther's theology was that in Jesus Christ the sovereign God has given Himself utterly and without reserve, for us. The gift of salvation, he said must be appropriated by faith alone. To have faith is to accept the salvation which is ours in Jesus Christ. But saving faith is not a self-generated human activity; it is a gift of the Holy Spirit. Luther's great discovery of the gospel became the watchword of the Reformation: *Justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone.*

The Dutch humanist, Desiderius Erasmus (1469-1536) was the greatest scholar of the 16th Century, and he agreed with Luther's criticism of the abuses in the church. He also edited the first published edition of the Greek new Testament, which Luther used to develop his Reformation theology. Thus some have said, "Erasmus laid the egg that Luther hatched!" In 1524, however, Erasmus published a treatise on the freedom of the will in which he attacked Luther's strong Augustinian understanding of grace.

PART SIX

MAN'S RESPONSE

TO

GOD'S GRACE

MAN'S RESPONSE TO GOD'S GRACE

INTRODUCTION:

I. MAN MUST KEEP GOD'S COMMANDMENTS.

- A. John 13:34: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another."
- B. 1 Tim. 1:5: "Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith."
- C. 1 Tim. 6:14: "that you keep this commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ's appearing."
- D. Matt. 22:40: "On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."
- E. John 14:15-24: "If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever - the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you. A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also. At that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you. He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him." Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, "Lord, how is it that You will manifest Yourself to us, and not to the world?" Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me."
- F. John 15:10: "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love."

- G. 1 John 3:22: “And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.”
- H. 1 John 5:3: “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.”
- I. 2 John 6: “This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it.”
- J. Rev. 12:17: “And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.”
- K. Rev. 14:12: “Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.”
- L. Rev. 22:15: “But outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves the practices a lie.”
- M. John 8:42: Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me.”
- N. John 11:3: Therefore the sisters sent to Him, saying, “Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick.”
- O. John 15:14-19: “You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you. You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you. These things I command you, that you love one another. If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.”
- P. John 17:17-19: Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. And

for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth.”

- Q. John 17:26: And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.”
- R. Rom. 5:5-8: “Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

II. MAN MUST LOVE GOD.

- A. Matt. 22:37: “Jesus said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord Your God with all your heart, with all your heart and with all your mind.’”
- B. Mark 12:30: “And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the first commandment.”
- C. Luke 10:27: “So he answered and said, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.’”
- D. John 3:16-21: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.”

III. LOVE THE BRETHREN.

- A. John 13:34: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another."
- B. John 15:12, 17: "This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. . . . These things I command you, that you love one another."
- C. Rom. 13:8: "Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law."
- D. 1 Thess. 4:9: "But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another."
- E. 1 Pet. 1:12: "To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven - things which angels desire to look into."
- F. 1 John 3:11, 23: "For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. . . . And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight."
- G. 1 John 4:7, 11-12: "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. . . . Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us."

TO RECEIVE GOD'S GRACE

I. A PERSON MUST HAVE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD.

- A. The Gospel Plan of Salvation.
 - 1. John 6:41-45: The Jews then complained about Him, because He said, "I am the bread which came down from heaven." And they

said, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How is it then that He says, "I have come down from heaven?" Jesus therefore answered and said to them, "Do not murmur among yourselves. No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, and they shall all be taught by God.' Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me."

2. John 8:32: "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."
3. Rom. 10:13-17: "For whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!" But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our report?" So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."
4. Mark 16:14-16: "Later He appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table; and He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen. And He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.'"
5. Matt. 28:18-20: "And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.' Amen."
6. Luke 24:45-49: "And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. Then He said to them, "Thus

it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things. Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.”

7. 1 Cor. 1:21-25: “For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”
8. Rom. 1:14-17: “For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “The just shall live by faith.”
9. Acts 10:34-43: “Then Peter opened his mouth and said: ‘In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him. The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ B He is Lord of all B that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they killed by hanging on a tree. Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly, not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God, even to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead. To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins.’”

10. Acts 13:44-49: "On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul. Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, 'It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us: *I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, that you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.* Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was being spread throughout all the region."

11. Paul Revealed God to the Athenians.
 - a. Acts 17:22-31: "Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, 'Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription:

TO THE UNKNOWN GOD.

Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you: God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.' Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine

Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising. Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead."

B. To Receive God's Grace, a Man Must:

1. Have a knowledge of God.
2. Believe that God exists.
3. Confess such faith.
4. Repent and turn to God.
5. Be baptized for forgiveness of sin.
6. Live a faithful Christian life.

NOTE: This is not working one's way to heaven. It is obeying God's commands; being appreciative of God's sacrifice of His Son to save us. Forever.

II. TO RECEIVE GOD'S GRACE, MAN MUST BELIEVE.

A. Faith.

1. Gal. 3:22: "But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe."
2. Eph. 1:19-23: "and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all."

3. 1 Thess. 4:14: "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus."
4. 1 Tim. 4:10: "For to this end we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe."
5. Heb. 10:39: "But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul."
6. Heb. 11:6: "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him."
7. Rom. 6:8: "Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him."
8. Rom. 10:9-10, 17: "that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. . . . So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."
9. Acts 8:37: "Then Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart, you may.' And he answered and said, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.'"
10. Acts 15:11: "But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they."
11. Acts 16:31: "So they said, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.'"
12. 1 Cor. 1:21: "For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe."

B. To Believe What?

1. That God exists.
2. That He is the creator of the universe.
3. That Jesus the Christ - God's Son died for our sins.

He is God - Very God.

4. That the Bible is God's inspired word.
5. That our universe is sustained by our God.
6. That God has the course of history in His hands.
7. That there is eternal life in Heaven.
8. That there is eternal death in hell.
9. That God has:
 - a. All knowledge.
 - b. All wisdom.
 - c. All power.
 - d. Exists everywhere.
 - e. A God of love.

C. Man Chooses His Eternal Residence.

1. Believe is a verb - Demands action on God's commands.
2. Man is offered salvation.
 - a. Man can accept or reject God's gift to mankind.
 - b. God's grace is not irresistible!
 - (1) Man can refuse God's grace or he can accept it.
 - c. God gave the right to choose.
 - (1) To choose God.
 - (2) To reject God.

D. Salvation is Free to All Mankind.

1. Christ paid the penalty for all our sins.

Jesus paid it all,
All to Him I owe.
Sin has left a crimson stain,
He washed it white as snow.

2. Man cannot save himself by merit.
3. He can receive grace by obedience.

BELIEVE

Sola fide is important not merely because the church stands or falls on it. It is important because on it ~~we~~ stand or fall. The place where and the time when we will either stand or fall is at the judgment seat of God.

The doctrine of justification has to do with our status before the just judgment of God. That every person will ultimately be called into account before God is central to the teaching of Jesus. He warns that the secret things of our lives will be made manifest before the Father and that every idle word we have spoken will be brought into judgment. The whole world - every man, woman, and child - will come before the final divine tribunal. We will all come to that place, at that time, as either unjustified or justified sinners. Paul at Mars Hill warned: "Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, 'because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained'" (Acts 17:30-31 NKJV).

Christians were once debtors who could not pay their debts to God. The law of God requires perfection. It is a requirement sinners do not and cannot meet. Because of the universal reality of sin, Paul comes to his "therefore." Our sin leads to the necessary inference contained in the conclusion that by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in God's sight.

But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God which is through faith in Jesus Christ to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth *to be* a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. (Rom. 3:21-26 NKJV).

To be saved one must believe certain basic information. It may be a bare minimum, but it is something. For example, to be justified by faith one must believe that there is a God by whom and before whom we are justified. To be saved we may

not require an exhaustive or comprehensive knowledge of God, for none of us possesses such comprehensive knowledge, but we must have some knowledge and we must have some *right* knowledge about God. If we believe God is an impersonal, cosmic force, that wrong knowledge about God will not justify us. Indeed it will convict us of idolatry.

The task of proclaiming the gospel includes more than an imparting of information, but not less. It demands a constant clarification of the content of the gospel. Since its inception, the church has struggled against error, distortions, and heresies of all sorts, all of which work against a true understanding of the gospel. Christianity necessarily and intrinsically involves doctrine. Again, it is more than doctrine but by no means less. (The right believing of right doctrine is at least to some degree a necessary condition for justification and therefore for salvation. Right doctrine protects the believer from falsehood and superstition.)

The element of saving faith is intellectual assent. Intellectual assent involves the assurance or conviction that a certain proposition is true. When we say that we believe George Washington was the first president of the United States, we mean that we affirm the truth of that proposition. This is not faith of a religious sort, but it is integral to a person's belief-system concerning real states of affairs.

A person may decide to act on the question in various ways. He may resolve to study the matter more closely, to examine the evidence. As a result of this decision to act, he may actually come to the place that he gives mental assent to the truth of the proposition. This approaches what St. Augustine described as a *provisional faith*. This faith involves taking provisional steps while still in doubt about the matter in question, steps that may indeed bring clarity and conviction.

Luther spoke of the importance of assurance in true faith, though he also acknowledged the difference between strong and weak faith. He said:

Faith is and, indeed, must be a steadfastness (*ein Standfest*) of the heart, which does not waver, wobble, shake, tremble, or doubt, but stands firm and is sure of its case . . . When this Word enters the heart by true faith, it makes the heart as firm, sure, and certain as it is itself, so that the heart is unmoved, stubborn, and hard in the face of every temptation, the devil, death, and anything whatever, boldly and proudly despising and mocking everything that spells doubt, fear, evil, and wrath. For it knows that God's Word cannot lie.

At times, the word *heart* is used interchangeably with the word *mind* or *spirit* or even *soul*. At other times, these are used in figurative or metaphorical ways, sometimes being distinguished and at other times being virtually identified with each other.

The Old Testament declares: "As a man thinks in his heart, so is he" (Prov. 23:7). This verse is clearly not intended to suggest that the primary organ of thought is a muscle in the chest that pumps blood. The writer understood (at least to some degree) the biological difference between the brain and the heart. When he speaks of the "heart" thinking, he is speaking of the thinking that reaches the depth or "core" of our being. This thinking penetrates the surface of mere awareness or reflection and takes anchor in the soul. This could simply refer to the various levels of intensity with which a truth is known or affirmed. It is what some refer to as "core beliefs."

When considering the impact that ideas, propositions, and thoughts have on our lives, we may distinguish among various levels or stages of intensity. Consider the commandment "Thou shalt not steal" as an example. Before I can act with any virtue of obedience or vice of disobedience with respect to this law, I must first be *conscious* or aware of it. The Bible declares that where there is no knowledge of the law there is no transgression. (This has technical ramifications where distinctions are necessary for the sake of precision, but we are interested here simply in the broad concern.)

Our response to such a law, our behavior with respect to it, is related to our degree of *consciousness*, *conviction*, and *conscience*. For a truth to take root in our conscience, we must first be conscious of it. We can be aware that God says we must not steal but have no conviction about the matter. One role of the Holy Spirit is to convict us of sin and of righteousness. We must be not only aware or conscious of the law, but also convinced of its import before it becomes a matter of conscience. Yet it remains possible for a person to be aware or conscious that stealing is wrong and continue to steal. A person may be convinced that it is wrong and continue to steal. Once it becomes a matter of conscience, it is still possible to commit the sin. We are capable and indeed often proficient in acting against our consciences. Luther was right when he declared at Worms that it is "neither right nor safe" to act against conscience.

The conscience, as St. Thomas Aquinas maintained, can act as both *accuser* and *excuser*. It plays both roles. When a law becomes a matter of conscience with us, this does not guarantee we will obey it. We all know the experience of doing something we are conscious is wrong, convinced is wrong, and of having our consciences howl in protest.

Conscience does not abolish sin, but it does retard it. Its power of retardation is linked to the degree of intensity with which the conscience is endowed. The strengthening of conscience is vital to our sanctification. That it can be strong or weak, however, attests to the matter with which we are presently concerned: the depth dimension of faith.

The element of faith probes the depth dimension that involves not only the cognitive but the affective and volitional response. When Gordon Clark objects to separating these elements from each other, he is correct. They must not be separated even though we may be inclined to do so. In Jonathan Edwards's epic work *The Freedom of the Will*, he defines the will as "the mind choosing." Here the act of choosing (which may be distinguished actively from the act of thinking and can therefore be attributed to something we call "will") is not the action of some organ that exists independent of the mind. If an action is indeed voluntary, if it involves a conscious choice, it is clearly an activity of the mind in the first instance.

Values and ethics get confused when we begin to value things that are bad. Jesus addressed this problem when he raised the rhetorical question, "What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?" (Mark 8:36 NKJV).

Here Jesus makes a statement about the value of a particular act of barter. The man exchanges his soul for the world. He values the world more than he values his soul. In terms of his *perception* of value, he has made a great deal. In terms of Jesus' perception of value, he has made a terrible deal. Indeed he has made a trade that is both evil (because he violates the law of God) and stupid (because in the long run he loses).

It is not by accident that the biblical concept of repentance is expressed by the word *metanoieo*, which literally means a "changing of the mind."

For saving faith to occur, there must be a real change in the person. The change is rooted in a transformation of one's perception of Christ. The Spirit quickens us and reveals to us something we did not formerly experience, namely the sweetness and excellence of Christ. It is a radical change of perceived value. Where formerly we were hostile or indifferent (a thinly veiled form of hostility) toward Christ, now we perceive him as the Pearl of Great Price that we must possess at all cost.

This certainly involves a change in emotion, disposition, inclination, and volition. We now choose Christ. We embrace Christ. We gladly receive Christ. Indeed we flee to Christ. Reformation theology insists that regeneration that changes

the heart of the sinner must *precede* faith. My perception of the value of Christ must change before I will ever embrace him or personally trust him.

We judge the gospel to be not only true, but also good and therefore most worthy of our love and desire; also the promises of grace to be most certain concerning the remission of sins and the bestowal of salvation upon all believers and penitents and so also upon me if I shall believe and repent.

“Now this persuasion ought not to be only inchoate and half full (which sometimes exists in the reprobate also who receive the word with joy), but full and absolute, determining and drawing after it the will and beholding the gospel object and the promise of grace, not only as true and imbued with a certain good, but also as the highest good proposed to us in God and affording the sole and most sufficient means of salvation in Christ.”

ACTS OF FAITH

Knowing all things to be believed by us, whether pertaining to our misery or to the grace of God.

Receiving as true and divine what we know.

Judging the gospel to be good and worthy of our love and desire. Judging the promises of grace to be most certain concerning the remission of sins and the bestowal of salvation on all who believe and repent, including myself if I believe and repent.

Betaking ourselves by an act of desire to Christ, seeking in him pardon of sin and salvation.

Apprehending and receiving Christ, embracing him, applying him to ourselves, adhering to him, and uniting ourselves to him.

Concluding that I have believed and therefore that Christ has certainly died for me, I belong to him, and I will assuredly be made happy in him.

Experiencing the joy, tranquility, peace, acquiescence, and delight that arise from the possession of Christ.

The Christian world-view is grounded in the belief that God is eternally personal and moral. He is the Creator of all things and continues to reign over the universe.

Thus the created world is real and not illusion. Further, humanity is God's unique creation, made in his own image with the capacity for fellowship with himself. Belief in the Creator-God becomes the watershed between impersonal and personal views, between meaning and meaningless.

The Bible tells us that our longing for purpose and for meaning in history has been placed within us by God, and that this longing can be satisfied only by our turning to him. We have been made to love God, to reflect his character, and enjoy him forever. We have been made to love, enjoy and serve one another, and to enjoy God's creation and care for it as his stewards. We are living in a fallen and twisted world where sin has brought enmity and brokenness at every level - between ourselves and God, within our own personalities, between ourselves and others, between us and the creation, within creation itself. Everything is touched by sin and death. Yet God in his love has sent his own Son, Jesus Christ, to redeem us and the whole creation from sin and death. Through what Jesus Christ has done, by faith in him, we are restored to fellowship with God. Within that relationship, we can begin to find new wholeness as people. We have a calling to bring God's restoration to the whole of life, and to work for the healing of all the brokenness which sin has produced in ourselves and in the world. God promises us that the goal of history is a new creation, in which the brokenness of every aspect of life will be removed and everything made new. (Our own individual lives are given eternal significance and history is heading towards a glorious conclusion.)

God promises us liberty if we obey his law. The law of God, his will for our lives, is a reflection of God's character. We are made to be like God. The law, then, is not a set of arbitrary rules imposed by a dictatorial God, rather it is fitted to human life. In the letter of James, we find that "the man who looks intently into the perfect law, that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it - he will be blessed in what he does." If we obey God's law, we shall enjoy life. God's truth sets us free to live.

Jesus' historical mission, then, included the founding of the Christian church, in fulfillment of God's purpose to form a new humanity. This means the church is a part of the gospel, since it is one of the results of Christ's work. Paul saw the formation of the church, with the participation of Jews and Gentiles on an equal basis, as God's secret plan, revealed by the Spirit to the New Testament apostles and prophets. This plan is "to bring all creation together, everything in heaven and on the earth, with Christ as head." The church, created through the gospel, is the foretaste of the plan, yet it also embodies here and now God's intention to bring all creation together under the lordship of Jesus Christ.

God desires not only to save individuals but to form a people. And so no evangelism is biblical unless it leads women and men to become part of a local congregation, where they can experience the reality of fellowship in Jesus. The New Testament knows nothing of solitary Christians; it only knows Christians who, as members of the "body of Christ," *together with others*, grow in Christ.

Christian Mission

The Christian mission includes both evangelism and service, word and action. Mission involves both bringing God's love to people where they are, and working for a better world, with social and political structures that reflect God's good will for human life. It begins with God, who in love is always reaching out after the human race, and it returns to God, as that same love draws men and women from all nations to form his own people.

Church and mission are inseparable, there is no church without mission nor mission without the church. The agent of mission is the Holy Spirit, but the Holy Spirit works through the church.

The first thing to notice is that the church fulfils its mission not only by what it *does* but also by what it *is*. We have already seen how people today are more influenced by Christian corporate life than by Christian argument. This was equally so in New Testament times. The early growth of the Jerusalem church had a lot to do with the quality of community life portrayed by Christians.

We are told in the Acts of the Apostles that "All the believers continued together in close fellowship and shared their belongings with one another. They would sell their property and possessions, and distribute the money among all, according to what each one needed. Day after day, they met as a group in the Temple, and they had their meals together in their homes, eating with glad and humble hearts, praising God.

TIME AND ETERNITY

Time is real.

The Christian picture of time is quite different, because Christianity has a different view of God as creator and saviour. The Bible speaks of yesterday, today and tomorrow and of God's intervention in history and in individual lives. But time is never viewed as an abstract philosophical concept. God acts in history. Time, like the

created world, is real because it is part of God's creative action. It is not illusion. We speak of God's intervention in the world as "salvation history."

In the incarnation, cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we see God's unique and final act that has significance for all time. All those who share in God's eternal life, whether they lived before Christ or after, do so because of this one event in time. Many in the East and West have found this hard to accept. For Mahatma Gandhi, no atoning event 2,000 years ago could have eternal meaning now, though he himself wept at the sight of a crucifix. He had a different understanding of the meaning of the event and time.

The Bible speaks of time as *chronos*, chronological time of days and hours, and as *kairos*, time of opportunity, promise and fulfillment. We should not exaggerate the difference between these two understandings, both are biblical and should be held together. Christ came in a specific moment of time, and he promised to return visibly in a moment of time. Yet the Bible is rich in expressing times of opportunity and promise. The "day of the Lord" is seen as the time of fulfillment. At the last day, there will be a new creation and time will be caught up into eternity.

Many Christians have pictured time as a straight line, or as a line moving upward, to reflect the idea that biblical time has purpose and is moving towards a goal. (Movement along the line is from past to future; God's creation began time, Jesus Christ's coming is the mid-point, and his return will bring time to an end.)

Because time is so real to us, we are tempted to think that God is also bound by time and we become involved in unnecessary debates. God is eternal. He is the I AM ("Before Abraham was born I am," said Jesus); God, who is eternal, created time and surrounds it on all sides. Our future is always present to him. Some have found help in C. S. Lewis's picture of time as a straight line along which we travel and of God as the whole page on which the line is drawn. God from above or outside or all around contains the whole of time and sees it all.

No human analogy or picture can fully explain the mystery of time and eternity. But we can share John's confidence that, when a person responds to Jesus Christ, eternity breaks into time and they experience God's eternal life.

In the Bible, there is scarcely a word which has a more varied and a richer meaning than the word "faith." If you have faith in someone, you trust in that person's character. So, in the Bible, faith rests in the character of God. He keeps his promises to men and women; he can be trusted.

In the Old Testament, the prophets spoke of the Lord's "steadfast love," his faithfulness to his people. They may wander away from him but he remains faithful.

The basis of New Testament faith is the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. If people "believe" in Jesus, they trust in the fact of what Jesus has done for them. And so even faith is not the most fundamental thing in a person's salvation; what comes first is God's faithfulness, both in promise and in action. Human beings' faith is a response to God's initiative.

Trust and Commitment.

Especially in Paul's letters and in John's Gospel, we find that faith means trusting our whole life to God. The modern word "commitment" comes very close to this.

The New Testament seldom says merely "believe ...", but rather "believe in" (literally "into") God or Jesus. What is required is not just assent to an idea, but humble acceptance of what God has done.

Faith, then, is *trust* in what God has done, which results in a wholehearted commitment, trusting ourselves to him. This affects every area of our life.

The Bible also makes it clear that "faith" cannot be separated from our life, our behaviour and the world we live in. James writes that "faith without works is dead." But he is not contradicting the emphasis in the rest of the New Testament that we are saved by faith alone. His point is that mere intellectual belief is barren. The demons believe in God, he says, but it makes no difference to their conduct. A real faith will always issue in a changed life.

When Christians in their worship say "this is the faith of the church," they mean the Christian faith expressed in the Bible and in the creeds of the church. The difference of emphasis between a Protestant and a Catholic understanding of "faith" comes out here. When a Protestant uses the word "faith," he or she normally has in mind our personal response to God. The Catholic would most naturally assume that it is the faith of the church that is being discussed, faith expressed in creeds.

To have faith is to accept what God has revealed of himself in Jesus. To have faith is to yield ourselves to Jesus in the light of what he has revealed.

Conversion.

The word “conversion” literally means a “turning,” a “changeover.” In Britain during the change from coal gas to natural gas, people spoke about being “converted” to natural gas. When used of the Christian life, it is associated with moving from one way of living to another, from ungodliness to holiness.

Awareness of need. No one comes to faith in Jesus without a sense that something is missing in life. This can take different forms with different people. One person may be conscious of moral failure, an inability to overcome temptation. Another may be aware of a sense of frustration and futility in life. Another may come to realize that life has no meaning unless God is brought into the picture. All this shows that there are many different kinds of sin, and our longing for God finds expression in very varied ways. In the Bible, Mary Magdalene’s problem was different from Paul’s, and Peter’s was different again. But each of them saw Jesus as the answer.

Willingness to turn. The word for this is “repentance.” The word for “repentance” in Greek means to turn round or have a change of heart and attitude. Repentance involves being sincerely sorry for our sin and willing to change direction.

Faith in Jesus Christ. Turning is one thing, but in itself is not enough. Many people like to turn over a new leaf, but this does not make them Christians.

Jesus called people “to repent *and believe the gospel.*” A person must accept Jesus as who he claimed to be, the Saviour and Lord of our lives. It means taking up his yoke. By a conscious decision, I turn my back on my old life and enter a new life based on Jesus. I become a disciple, a follower of Jesus, who learns to live his way.

In the Acts of the Apostles and the teaching of Paul, the death and resurrection of Jesus are put central in Christian conversion. If Jesus died for sinners and rose to prove it, so the Christian must die to the old nature and begin afresh through the Holy Spirit. This is expressed in baptism. Indeed, baptism in the New Testament and in the early church was in itself a symbol of conversion, in that it graphically declared a person’s rejection of the old life and entry into new life.

Looking back on the questions raised earlier, we may now be able to suggest some answers. It is clear from human experience that “sudden” conversions are rarely sudden at all. Usually they are the result of thought and exploration which have gone on for a long time. C. S. Lewis told us that he came to belief in God on top of a double-decker bus. But this was the climax of a long, painful search.

For some, conversion is a "crisis" event. But the experience of many Christians in all traditions of the Christian churches is that this discovery of faith may come through steady growth and teaching in the Christian life, without any crisis of belief or identifiable turning point.

Tomorrow makes a poor substitute for eternity. The new Testament speaks of the Holy Spirit being given as a "guarantee" of our inheritance, a sort of down payment of what we will fully receive in heaven.

Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, there are foretastes in our experience of our ultimate calling as children of God. These echoes include the desire to serve God, an awareness of his presence, the overcoming of temptation through his power, the desire to worship. In these and many other ways, the Holy Spirit confirms to our hearts that we are children of God. This all gives us firm ground to stand on in the uncertainties and pains of life.

Christian assurance, we must note, is not based on our own subjective experience, but on God's promise that we *are* sons and daughters of God. "He who comes to me," said Jesus, "I will never cast away." Though we may sometimes feel God is distant, his promise is our guarantee that he will not let us down.

Justification by Faith.

In the New Testament, many metaphors are used to express the reality of Christian salvation. Descriptions such as new birth, new creation, passing from darkness to light and from prison to freedom, all dramatically express the difference being a Christian makes.

One metaphor, used only by Paul is "justification by faith."

The term is borrowed from the law courts of the first century. The judge hears an accusation against a person, and declares the accused "justified." "Not guilty" or "innocent" are simply not strong enough to express what the judge means. He is really saying, "You stand before this court as one who is in the right."

It is important to realize therefore that justification is not primarily a statement of a person's moral worth. It is about a person being legally in the right.

When used in a Christian sense, it is a statement about our standing before God. It does not declare that we are righteous, but that in God's sight we are in a right relationship with him. It does not tell us *how* we became Christians but that we *are*.

The Basis for Justification

We need to be justified because we are in a serious position before God. We are incapable of rescuing ourselves. Salvation is only possible if it comes from God.

This is where 'grace' comes in. Grace is God's amazing love for sinners. He came to the rescue through Jesus, 'the righteous for the unrighteous. Here we have the basis for justification: the death and resurrection of Jesus. Through his death we are released from guilt and blame and through his victory over death we are made children of God.

And so humanity has no cause to boast before God. As the hymn puts it:

Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to your cross I cling.

How Are We Justified?

If grace is the foundation of justification, then surely faith is the means by which justification becomes the Christian's possession. Because of what sin is, we cannot earn salvation from it. This can only be accepted as a gift, because it is bought at the price of Jesus' death.

Where then do good deeds come in? Certainly not as a way of justifying ourselves before God. 'I go to church,' says someone, 'and do good to others. Surely these Christian things will be to my credit?' This is a very common belief. But if it were true, it would question the very point of Jesus' death. Why should God go to the extreme length of sending his Son to the cross if people are justified by their own good deeds? This is not to deny the importance of a good life, but good works are the fruit not the root of justification.

THE CHURCH A CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

All of these communities are discovering that conversion to Jesus requires a new pattern of relationships. If every aspect of a person's life is to become truly Christian,

that person needs to share life deeply with other Christians. Otherwise a Christian's attitudes and values can be indistinguishable from the society around, as happens so often in today's churches. Without a powerful enough support structure that can form us in the ways of Jesus and break the power of the world in our lives, the world will continue to squeeze us into its mould.

Supporting One Another

There is no normative form of community. But there is a Christian life-style, which we fail to find without some deliberate kind of structure and supporting environment. The New Testament speaks of a common life and mind; of bearing one another's burdens, of confronting, correcting, encouraging, exhorting, comforting, and edifying one another, of provoking one another to love and good works, of confessing our faults to one another; of weeping with those who weep and rejoicing with those who rejoice; of sharing with one another the same love and unity that Jesus shares with his Father.

The Bible also speaks of breaking free from our attachment to possessions, power and prestige, and of having our hearts softened to the poor and afflicted. It tells us to find our security in God alone, and not in the power of our nation. Too often we simply do not have the kind of structures in our present churches that can support that kind of life. Our communion with one another and with God must be strong enough to enable us to live as the New Testament teaches.

Unfortunately, if most Christians were asked, "Where is the place on which you feel most dependent for your survival?" few would be able to point to their local churches. Most would name their work place, or some other economic, educational or political institution. It is the social reality in which we feel most rooted that most determines our values and the way we live. We will remain conformed to the values and institutions of our society as long as our security is finally grounded in them.

The need is to create faith communities that gear in to the life of our society, but still are internally strong enough to enable us to survive as Christians. The renewal of church as community will enable us to resist the pressures of our culture and to proclaim something new in the midst of that culture.

III. 'TO RECEIVE GOD'S GRACE MAN MUST REPENT.'

A. Repentance Affects A Change:

1. Conversion is a single entity that has two distinguishable but inseparable aspects: repentance and faith. Repentance is the unbeliever's turning away from sin, and faith is his or her turning toward Christ. They are, respectively, the negative and positive aspects of the same occurrence. In a sense, each is incomplete without the other and each is motivated by the other. As we become aware of sin and turn from it, we see the necessity of turning to Christ for the provision of His righteousness. Conversely, believing in Christ makes us aware of our sin and thus leads to repentance.

Scripture gives no specifications concerning the amount of time conversion involves. On some occasions, it appears to have been a cataclysmic decision, taking place virtually in a moment's time.

Repentance

The negative aspect of conversion is the abandonment or repudiation of sin. This is what we mean by repentance. It is based on a feeling of godly sorrow for our sin. In examining repentance and faith, we should remember that they cannot really be separated from one another.



Two Hebrew terms express the idea of repentance. One is _____ (nacham), an onomatopoeic word signifying "to pant, sigh, or groan." It came to mean "to lament or to grieve." When referring to an emotion aroused by consideration of the situation of others, it connotes compassion and sympathy. When used in reference to an emotion aroused by consideration of one's own character and deeds, it means "to rue" or "to repent." Interestingly when _____ occurs in the sense of "repent," the subject of the verb is usually God rather than a human. A prime example is Genesis 6:6: "The Lord was grieved that He had made man on the earth, and His heart was filled with pain." Another example is Exodus 32:14. Having considered wiping out the people of Israel because of their sinfulness in worshiping the golden calf, God changed His mind: "Then the Lord relented and did not bring on His people the disaster He had threatened." A passage where the verb occurs with a human as its subject is found in Job. At the end of his long trial, Job says, "My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes." (Job 42:5-6).

The type of genuine repentance that humans are to display is more commonly designated by the word _____ (shub). It is used extensively in the

prophets' calls to Israel to return to the Lord. It stresses the importance of a conscious moral separation, the necessity of forsaking sin and entering into fellowship with God. One of the best-known uses is in 2 Chronicles 7:14: "If My people, who are called by My name, will humble themselves and pray and see My face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land." Having noted that God will visit wrath on His enemies, Isaiah adds, "The redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who repent of their sins," declares the Lord" (Isa. 59:20). Actually, the word can be used of either the negative or positive aspect of conversion.

There are also two major New Testament terms for repentance. The word _____ (metamelomai) means "to have a feeling of care, concern, or regret." Like _____, it stresses the emotional aspect of repentance, a feeling of regret or remorse for having done wrong.

The other major New Testament term for repentance is _____ (metanoia), which literally means "to think differently about something or to have a change of mind." The word was characteristic of John the Baptist's preaching: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (Matt. 3:2). It was also a key term in the preaching of the early church. On Pentecost, Peter urged the multitude, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

As we examine this matter of repentance, we cannot avoid being impressed with its importance as a prerequisite for salvation. The large number of verses and the variety of contexts in which repentance is stressed make clear that it is not optional but indispensable. That people in many different cultural settings were urged to repent shows that it is not a message meant only for a few specific local situations. Rather, repentance is an essential part of the Christian gospel. We have already noted the prominence of repentance in the preaching of John the Baptist. Indeed, one might contend that it was virtually the entirety of John's message.

(Recently, a school of thought has grown up within evangelicalism that insists that repentance and acceptance of the lordship of Christ is not necessary for salvation.)
All that is required is faith, defined as belief and acceptance. Repentance is a necessity for discipleship. This distinction between salvation and discipleship, however, is very difficult to sustain, as for instance, in the Great Commission, in Matthew 28:19, where Jesus commands His disciples to "go and make disciples."

It is important for us to understand the nature of true repentance. Repentance is godly sorrow for one's sin together with a resolution to turn from it. There are other forms of regret over one's wrongdoing that are based on different motivations. One form of regret may be motivated by little more than selfishness. If we have sinned and the consequences are unpleasant, we may well regret what we have done. But that is not true repentance. That is mere penitence. Real repentance is sorrow for one's sin because of the wrong done to God and the hurt inflicted upon Him. This sorrow is accompanied by a genuine desire to abandon that sin. In the case of true repentance, there is regret over the sin even if the sinner has not suffered any unfortunate personal effects because of it.

The Bible's repeated emphasis on the necessity of repentance is a conclusive argument against what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called "cheap grace" (or "easy believism"). It is not enough simply to believe in Jesus and accept the offer of grace; there must be a real alteration.

If belief in God's grace were all that is necessary, who would not wish to become a Christian? But Jesus said, "If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me" (Luke 9:23). (If there is no conscious repentance, there is no real awareness of having been saved from the power of sin.) There may be a corresponding lack of depth and commitment. After Jesus gave assurance that the many sins of the woman who had washed His feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair were forgiven, He made the comment that "he who has been forgiven little loves little" (Luke 7:47). Any attempt to increase the number of disciples by making discipleship as easy as possible ends up diluting the quality of discipleship instead.

Regeneration.

Conversion refers to the human being's response to God's offer of salvation and approach to the human. (Regeneration is the other side of conversion. It is completely God's doing. It is God's transformation of individual believers, His giving a new spiritual vitality and direction to their lives when they accept Christ.)

Underlying the doctrine of regeneration is an assumption regarding human nature. Human nature is in need of transformation. The human being is spiritually dead and therefore needs new birth or spiritual birth. We noted earlier that the natural person is unaware of and unresponsive to spiritual stimuli. (The biblical pictures of unregenerate humans as blind, deaf, and dead indicate a lack of spiritual sensitivity.) And not only are unbelievers unable to perceive spiritual truths; they are incapable of

doing anything to alter their condition of blindness and their natural tendency toward sin. When one reads the description of the sinful human in Romans 3:9-20, it is apparent that some radical change or metamorphosis is needed, rather than a mere modification or adjustment in the person. To some, this appears a very pessimistic view of human nature, and indeed it is, in terms of natural potential; but our view does not limit its expectations to natural possibilities.

The biblical description of the new birth are numerous, vivid, and varied. Even in the Old Testament, we find a striking reference to God's renewing work. He promises, "I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. Then they will follow My decrees and be careful to keep My laws. They will be My people, and I will be their God" (Ezek. 11:19-20). Although the terminology and imagery differ from the New Testament's, we have here the basic idea of transformation of life and spirit.

In the New Testament, the term which most literally conveys the idea of regeneration is _____ (*palin~~g~~nesia*). It appears just twice in the New Testament. One of these instances is Matthew 19:28, where it refers to the "renewal of all things" that will be part of the eschaton. The other is Titus 3:5, which refers to salvation: God our Savior "saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit." Here we have the biblical idea of rebirth. Although the literal term _____ is not found elsewhere in the New Testament, the idea is most certainly prominent.