

GRACE # 5485;

For many of us the concept of God's generous grace has been a stumbling block to our conversion to followers of Christ. It just seems so impossible to us that such a great gift as our salvation and freedom from the penalty of our sin could occur without a cost to us. Everything of this world or this present evil age that we possess is attached or related to something that we receive as a payment or a reward for something that we have accomplished. Amazing as it may be, the truth is, that grace is given to us absolutely free and is impossible for us to attain at any cost. We cannot relate to this precious gift to anything like it on earth because there is nothing like it on earth. God's grace wipes out all of our offenses against Him and provides an eternal life of bliss and joy.

Eph. 2:1-10; And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging in the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. But God being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus, in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

This is how Grace as defined in the NT: That which causes joy, pleasure, gratification, favor, acceptance, for a kindness granted or desired; a benefit, thanks, or gratitude. Grace is a favor done without expectation of return; the absolutely free expression of the loving kindness of God to men finding its only motive in the bounty and benevolence of the Giver; unearned and unmerited favor.

Grace stands as the direct antithesis of works, the two being mutually exclusive. God's grace affects man's sinfulness and not only forgives the repentant sinner, but brings joy and thankfulness to him. It changes the individual to a new creature without destroying his individuality. ***2 Cor. 5:17; Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature, the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come, Eph. 2:8, 9; For it is by grace that you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves it is the gift of God, not as a result of works, that no one should boast.*** When we read about anyone who is a believer in Christ and thus becomes a new creature (or creation), I wonder how many of us are willing to take an honest look at ourselves to see if there is any residual from the "old creature" still in us. It's

okay to see some of the old residual of the old creature in us. We won't be entirely free from this old creature until the day of our resurrection; however, we should be seeing progress in its termination. For me, I have to make a list, much like I would do if I were making a "pros and cons list." You know the kind of list where you list the pros on one side and the cons on the other; only on this list I would list the "current VALUES AND ATTITUDES of my life" and compare them to the "old ATTITUDES AND VALUES in my life." If I notice some of the old values or even a residual of the old attitudes that are still in my life I would assume that these are some of the things that the Lord wants me to confess and repent of, because these are things that I am still embracing from my old life that cannot be a part of my new life. Let's take a deeper look at **2 Cor. 5:17** and translate the Greek to the English so that we can take an honest look at our current life: *As a result, if anyone is cleansed from his sin and is in an intimate union, oneness of heart, mind, and purpose, with Christ by faith and has become as branches in the true vine, that person is changed to a qualitatively new creation that is different than he was previously, but changed for the better. An awakening of faith has taken place in him and he is renewed and changed in his heart from evil to good by the Spirit of God. The person that he was from the beginning of his life has passed on and has perished; but, even better still, and this is important, he has been reconciled to God and freed from being a prisoner of everything that holds him away from God and hence everything in him has become a new spiritual creation from God the Creator from above who has changed his nature from evil to good.* If anyone is in Christ, that is, saved, he is a new creation positionally. Before conversion, one might have discerned the character of others according to human standards, but now all of that has changed. Old methods of discernment have passed away; behold all things have become new. It may not be that things around us or people around us have changed as much as our own perspective that comes from a regenerated heart has changed. This verse is a favorite with those who have recently been born again, and is often quoted in personal testimonies. Sometimes in being thus quoted, it gives quite a false impression. Listeners are apt to think that when a man is saved, old habits, evil thoughts, and lustful looks are forever done away with and everything becomes literally new in a person's life. We know from our own experience's that this is not true, we still battle with our lusts, pride, and delights. This verse does not describe a person's practice but his position. Notice what the verse says, ***if anyone is in Christ***, The words "in Christ" are the key to this passage. "In Christ" old things have passed away and all things have become new. This describes a person who desires to be Christ-like. Unfortunately "in me" not all of this is true yet. But as I progress in the Christian life, I desire that my practice may increasingly correspond to my position. One day, when the Lord returns, the two will be in perfect harmony.

Grace, when received by faith, transforms man's heart and causes him to love and to seek after the righteousness of God. Grace is initially regeneration, the work of the Holy Spirit in which spiritual life is given to man and by which his nature is brought under the dominion of righteousness. The maintenance of this condition requires an unbroken and immense supply of

grace. Grace remains constant in, and basic to, a believers fight from without against the devil and his struggle from within against sin. It is not our fight that brings more grace to us, but it is the immense love of God and His desire to save man from spiritual death. The fight that we engage in is a direct result of the grace that we receive. Renewal is stimulated and impelled by God's illuminating and strengthening of the spirit of the man, and will continue and increase so long as the spirit perseveres. God's grace insures that those who have been truly regenerated will persevere until the end of life. This entire work is called sanctification, a work of God *"whereby we are renewed in the whole man and are enabled more and more to die daily unto sin and to live unto righteousness"* as is stated by the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*.

Rom. 12:2 and do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. 2 Cor. 4:16; Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. Eph. 4:23; and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind. Col. 3:10; and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him. All of this renewing of our heart and mind that we go through is a result of God's grace toward us. He shows us His favor by giving us and doing for us that which is beneficial for us now and on into eternity. In that mindset let's take a closer look at verse *Rom. 12:2; And also, in addition to presenting your bodies as a living and holy sacrifice I admonish you to not conform your life to the same pattern values and attitudes as to this present evil age outwardly, but be transformed into the invisible process of Christians inwardly which takes place or begins to take place during their life in this present age, by means of the renovation of your emotions and affections, your mode of thinking and feeling, your disposition and moral inclinations, so that you may distinguish what the gracious disposition of God is, that is, that which is good in a completely moral sense and well-pleasing in a moral sense, or to say according to what the will of God is.* We can't expect to be like God desires us to be and embrace this present evil age's values and attitudes at the same time; the two are mutually exclusive. We, therefore, must go through a transition, a re-creation, if you will, of everything that we have acquired in our past in a moral sense. If we have only accepted the standard of morality of this present age we have accepted a false morality because there can be nothing morally good in the outcome of an evil. I know that this is a controversial statement, but if we examine the motives of this false morality we can see how it falls short of God's morality. The world's morality is in a continual state of flux, that is, it is constantly changing. What was not morally acceptable yesterday is morally approved today. Morality that is established by sinful mankind is obviously tainted by sin and falls short of being perfect. God's morality is perfect because it is established with nothing but pure motives and true benevolence, that is, is not tainted by sin and it has always remained constant, never changing. We must be, as Paul teaches us, outwardly conformed but be inwardly transformed.

The god of this present evil age is the devil. Not even outwardly are we to adopt the fashion of the age that we now live in, that is, the ways of this world. Our visible conversations and life, which is what men see in us, are to show that we do not have anything in common with this age. Our conversations and our citizenship are in invisible His kingdom not the visible kingdom. There is always a danger that we as Christians will take on at least some of the world's ways as we take on relationships with men that live in and of this age; especially when we are mocked for not having relationships with their values and attitudes. Christians sometimes imagine that they can do this without it having an effect on them. They think that they can remain unspotted by this world while we associate with the worldly and their questionable pleasures.

To howl a bit with the wolves, or to do as the Romans do because we are in Rome, to avoid the abuse of the world and not lose all this tainted pleasure and advantage while still professing to follow Christ does not seem wrong initially. But it seems to be the unfortunate truth that immorality influences moral men more that morality influences immoral men. This separation from the attitudes and values of the world is what presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice and thus as our reasonable following of Christ means. What we do with our bodies and our whole bodily life should be the evidence of a constant inner metamorphosis, one that is accomplished *“by the renewing of the mind so that we can prove what the will of God is;”* prove out what is really good, well pleasing, and complete. This makes our mind conform to this divine newness and rejects everything else as being counterfeit. This inner transformation begins at the moment of our positional justification and advances throughout life until God completes it in our death. The Christian's inward transformation is affected when his moral mentality becomes renewed, the very mentality itself, not so that it will no longer think, understand, and judge as it once did, but so that it cannot do so because it is in a process of renewal that advances steadily.

The Christian's mind dwells on the things of the Spirit, something he had *never* done before, and ceases dwelling on the things of the flesh, something he *always* did before. As a son of God he is lead by the Spirit of God in his very mind and the use of his body shows it. Just as men test out coins or metal by accepting what is genuine and rejecting the counterfeit, the renewed mind is ever bent on finding out and following God's will. It has utterly ceased disregarding God's will and ceased settling for the lust of its own will; for God always wills the morally good and benevolent thing and never that which is morally bad, and this is what is “well-pleasing” to Him.

We never should say that whatever we judge to be good is God's will or what we think is well-pleasing to Him, nor what we consider to be morally good and spiritually complete. No testing out of what God wants is how we discover the thing that is good for us, pleasing to Him,

and complete in its self. So, how do we realize what is God's will for us? Namely what His will is, that which He wills, we discover from His Word and from that alone, and we subject all of our own conceptions of what is good, etc.; wholly from His Word. Every test that we make while excluding checking His Word is deceptive and wrong.

There is much in the Bible about grace, partly because there is much in the Bible about sin. The short definition for grace is the one that we are the most familiar with, grace is the undeserved favor of God. People repeatedly sin and rebel against God, yet God in His grace is still ready to forgive them when they repent ***Ex. 34:6; Then the Lord passed by in front of him and proclaimed, "the Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in loving kindness and truth (or faithfulness). Rom. 5:20; And the Law came in that the transgression might increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.*** Anyone that reads Paul's writings can appreciate that he was an intellectual of his day, even for us today I must read him very slowly and cautiously to make sure I understand his point. The book of Romans can sometimes be a little confusing and difficult to understand. Sometimes his statements can seem contradictory so we must try to climb inside Paul's mind and expand on the words he uses to try to understand his points; let's define his words in this verse Rom. 5:20, to see if we can help ourselves understand: *On the other hand besides the Mosaic statutes there were other laws added so that the habits of sin or the willful transgressions of known rules of life that involve guilt could be made more evident; but where the habits of the sins of life were made more evident the grace, favor, and goodwill of God and Christ abounded much more.*

When Adam and Eve sinned and more specifically when Adam sinned, it caused a permanent change in our spiritual DNA. That is we were not born free from sin or into fellowship with God, as Adam and Eve were, but the "original sin" of Adam caused a separation (death) from God between Adam and Eve which we carry on in our "spiritual DNA." Men, in general, since then, have lived according to their own standard of morality and on this course of life their morality was in a steady decline, so much so that God found it necessary to give us the Law, through Moses, which pointed out our sin. It's hard to imagine how God's sense of morality would manifest itself while being separated from God; His morality was pretty much non-existent. Much like our Constitution of the United States and its many amendments, men found it necessary to add to the original Law to make the Law more specific and applicable, because men were continually trying to excuse themselves from strict adherence to the Law. Although the Law covered every situation and condition of life men were always trying to create themselves as being righteous. There is no way, of course, that man can create righteousness for himself that meets God's moral standard, men will do what is right in their own eyes eventually. These additions are more frequently referred to as "law" rather than "The Law." In this verse Paul is giving the Christian a plain instruction regarding the place for the law

and regarding the activity of the law. He also addresses “law” in this verse as a general term which most certainly the Mosaic Law comes under the category of law and is included in this verse. But other laws also came in. But they were less perfect than the Law of Moses but it had a similar effect. Paul discusses the result of the law and not the purpose. The result being that when the law increased man’s awareness of his sin, at the same time and corresponding to this awareness came an increasing even more abundantly grace increased even more. We cannot proportionately out-sin God’s grace. As sin came into the world through one man it increased through generations, because the awareness of sin increased and so did the need for the law to increase. Systematically as we became more aware of our sin we became more aware of the depths of our sin through the fall of Adam, for it not only intensified sin as transgressions, it multiplied sin, the very prohibitions of the law provoked transgressions. As we learn more about our God a paradox takes place; coinciding with the more we learn about God we also learn how sinful and depraved we are in our flesh.

So on which side of God’s standard of morality did the law belong when it came in? It came in on the side of Adam’s fall; on the side of sin. It did not have any saving power in and of itself and it did not change men’s hearts. Its effect was only external. More over since it came in later beside the sin and the death that had already come in; law was secondary in regard to them. Without them the law would’ve never had a place; thus the function of the law is secondary too. The law only increased what was already there; it brought nothing new, nothing like grace. So this is what the law did it increased sin, but it super increased grace. The rescuing power of grace not only equaled the damning power of sin, it towered high above it.

So much is grace a characteristic of God that the Bible calls Him the God of grace, **1 Peter 5:10, and after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.** In this verse Peter wants us to know that we never suffer alone. Christians world-wide go through the same suffering as we do no matter what form that suffering takes, whether physical, or psychological. The encouragement of this is that no matter to what depth we suffer God’s grace will be there for us as we go through it and will help us to overcome our travail and will continue after it’s over. One might assume, from the text, that this suffering is a cleansing process of the heart, so let’s look a little deeper at this verse and expand it to see what the full intention of Peter is when he teaches us this verse: *In addition, after you have been subjected to evil for a small amount of time, the true God to the utmost of the free expression of His loving kindness toward man, which has its only motive of giving in the benevolence of the Giver, and who is the same One who exhorted you to His constant abiding, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which is not affected by the limitations of time, the glory that God will bestow in Christ, will Himself form and make us as we should be, a perfect fit, suitable, not deficient in any part of us, made steadfast in our mind, without weaknesses,*

and firmly grounded. True victory in persecution is to see God behind the scenes working out His purposes. No matter what our trials we should remember first of all that God is the God of all inexhaustible grace. This lovely title of our God reminds us that His dealings with us are not based on what we deserve, but on His thoughts of love for us. No matter how fierce our testing, we can always be thankful we are not in hell where we ought to be had it not been for our Savior.

A second strong consolation is that He has called us to His eternal glory. This enables us to look beyond the sufferings of this life to the time when we shall be with the Savior and be like Him forever. Just think of it! We have been picked up from the scrap heap and called to His eternal glory.

A third comfort is that suffering is just for a while. It will come to an end, and we must not get impatient, as hard as it might be to maintain this attitude, for the end to come. Thus we should not be trying to take control over what God has ordained is doable for us, and cutting short His will in our life. When contrasted with eternal glory life's afflictions are only momentary.

A final encouragement is that God uses suffering to educate us and mold us into our Christian character. He is training us to be with Him in His reign. This verse mentions four aspects of that training;

(1) Perfect—Trials make the believer fit; they supply needed elements in his character to make him spiritually mature.

(2) Established—suffering makes Christians more stable, able to maintain a good confession, and bear up under pressure. This is the same word the Lord Jesus used with Peter; ***strengthen (or establish) your brethren, Luke 22:32.***

(3) Strengthen—Persecution is intended by Satan to weaken and wear out believers, but it has the opposite effect. It strengthens them to endure.

(4) Settle—this verb is related to the word for “foundation” in the original Greek. God wants every believer to be firmly planted in a secure place in His Son and in His word. *The inevitable suffering of the Christian life always yields the same blessed result in the character of the believer; it will refine the faith, adjust the character, establish, strengthen and settle the people of God (Lacey).*

The only way people have ever been forgiven of their sin and saved from condemnation is by God's grace, and they received this salvation through faith in the work of our Lord Jesus Christ; ***Eph. 2:8, For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that (salvation is) not of***

yourselves, it is a gift of God. Because of our sin we are a hopeless, helpless race, to receive anything but punishment for that sin. But, God so love the world that He provided a means of escaping the punishment and live with Him forever. He reached out His hand to us and gave us the gift of grace. He does not force this gift on anybody but it its free to anyone who wants to accept it and He does not require that we reimburse Him in any way. Where we knew only hopelessness and helplessness He provided hope and help by means of His free gift of grace and mercy. Let's expand a little more on Eph. 2:8, *Therefore by means of His absolutely free expression of His loving kindness to men you have been rescued and preserved from spiritual death, a spiritual death which is common to all men because of Adam's sin, and by means of faith, which is expressed through appropriate behavior to the new life in Christ and in Christ's death as the grounds of being made righteous before God and that absolutely free expression of His gracious disposition to men that rescued us from spiritual death, this disposition does not proceed out of the work you have done for yourselves ; meaning and knowing this that this grace is given so that we can honor God.*

Our salvation all originates with the grace of God: He takes the initiative in providing it. Salvation is given to those who are utterly unworthy of it, on the basis of the Person and the work of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is given as a personal possession. Those who are saved can know it. Writing to the Ephesians Paul said to them and to us "you have been saved;" He knew it, they knew it and we can know it. The way to receive the gift of eternal life is through faith. Faith means that man takes his place as a lost, guilty sinner, and receives the Lord Jesus as his only hope of salvation. True saving faith is the commitment of a person to a Person. Any idea that man can earn or deserve salvation is forever exploded by the words, "and that not of yourselves." Dead people can do nothing, and sinners (who are spiritually dead) deserve nothing but punishment. ***Rom. 6:23; for the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*** I think that it is important to not realize the fullness of this verse, so, let's amplify it to get a fuller understanding of it: *because the recompense of missing the true end and scope of our lives, which is God, is eternal separation from God; however, the redemption and salvation through Christ, is an undeserved benefit of God and is a perpetual abiding with Christ Jesus, our Master, which is not affected by the limitations of time.* It is a gift from God. A gift of course, is a free and unconditional offering. This is the only basis on which God offers salvation. The gift of God is salvation by grace through faith. It is offered to all people everywhere. People have never been saved through obeying the law or the offering of sacrifices nor anything else that man has decided can merit eternal life, ***Rom. 3:24-26, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publically as propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration I say, of His righteousness at the present time, that He might be just and the Justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Gal. 3:17-22, What I am***

saying is this: the law, which came four-hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise. Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed should come to whom the promise had been made. Now a mediator is not for one part only; whereas God is only one. Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be! For if a Law had been given which was able to impart life then righteousness would indeed have been based on law. But the Scripture has shut up all men under sin that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. Let's amplify the verses from Romans to get a better understanding of what Paul is teaching us: *Being declared righteous freely, without charge, by His absolutely free expression of the loving kindness of God to men finding its only motive in the bounty and benevolence of the Giver and by means of the deliverance from the power and consequences of sin which Christ Jesus procured by shedding His blood and laying down His life on account of the ransom paid by Him; whom God had in mind in His design for salvation before hand to set our eyes on as being the perfect sacrifice of blood that represented the life He gave as an atoning for a wrong done by us, which, by the way, was preceded by persuasion of what the Father wanted Him to do. This was to show us the result of His doing what was required by the Father, for in the suffering of God He put aside the deeds of our disobedience without punishment that were previously committed; for this demonstration of love I say, of the Father, required Him to do this at that particular time that was definitely marked out, so that He might act conformably to justice and righteousness without any deficiency or failure and the One who bestows justification upon men through Jesus Christ, through the instrumentation of faith in Him.* The point is exactly this; God cannot possibly extend His acknowledgement or recognize as His children sinners ("for all have sinned") when nothing but the law and their sins are before Him, i.e., He cannot declare a single person righteous based on this evidence. In a world of sinners anything like law only robs us of His favorable acknowledgement, of His verdict of righteous. But thank God He meets this apparently hopeless condition by other more blessed means and ways other than the law. God has the means and the way of declaring a person righteous despite the universal sinfulness of man; consequently we are not hopelessly lost! Although not all persons will be declared righteous the ways and means is available to everyone; it's only their choices that keep them from this verdict of righteous.

God's justifying act was accomplished while men were yet sinners. The fact of their being sinners does not make it impossible for God to render the verdict of "righteous!" While all, as far as the sinners are concerned, have lost any and all favorable acknowledgement from God in our sin, there exists another way of being declared righteous, one that is wholly gratuitous, entirely by grace, mediated through the ransom connected with Christ Jesus. The fact of this declaration of righteousness is reserved for those who have made the choice to believe in the redeeming work of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a gift; we have the choice to refuse

the gift, and unfortunately, from what we witness; it seems that this is the most popular choice among men, i.e. unbelievers choose to exclude themselves. It is not man's sin that excludes him from being declared righteous, for as we already know all of us are sinners, it is his refusal to accept God's grace that keeps him from being declared righteous. *"Gospel justification finds as miserable sinners all to whom it comes and clothes in its garment all the destitute sinners upon whom it comes. Here we see how far the promise of the gospel extends; as far as sin extends, over the whole world; and, we are to arm ourselves with such universal terms as "all" against the false notion of predestination"...* (Besser).

Just because all are sinners, because there is no exception, God's verdict is pronounced "gratuitously" by way of a gift, gratis. It could not come to us in any other way for in the entire world of sinners not one mite of merit exists. The gratuity is absolute. But this is the only way in which it fits sinners most perfectly. The foundation of making the correct choice is based on our faith; no personal justification can take place except through faith. Without faith it is impossible to make the correct choice to accept the gift of the undeserved grace from God because without faith we are ignorant that the gift even exists.

Sinners deserve the verdict of "guilty;" the verdict of "acquitted" is possible only as one that is wholly undeserved. This is the voice of not mere justice, but of pure, abounding, astounding grace. But how can the just Judge of heaven and earth, without becoming unjust and destroying all justice, follow grace and declare righteous any sinner whose sin cries to heaven for just punishment? Only by one means; the one means that perfectly satisfies God's justice and opens the way for grace; through the ransoming that is connected to Jesus Christ. Ransoming is defined as "an act that secures release by paying a price." But in the discussion we must try to maintain the integrity of the act performed; this was a redemption not just a mere "liberation" or release in general. Liberation would indicate that we are still just sinners that have been freed from captivity while we maintain our status as a sinner. When we are declared as righteous we are positionally no longer considered by God to be sinners.

In this verse Paul names the ransom as the blood of Christ or the death of Christ. He took our sin away from us and made us pure; our hearts are no longer polluted by sin. The ransoming consists in this that God set forth Christ Jesus as a cover or lid of the mercy seat to be effective through faith and in connection with His blood. God is the initiator throughout. This is a vital point. In a most sacred and solemn act God "did set forth for Himself" Christ Jesus. God set forth Christ as a cover of the mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant in the Tabernacle. Christ was not the cover of the lid of the physical Ark, He was its antitype. It is faith in Christ's redemptive work that Paul stresses in this entire presentation by continuing to use the word over and over again all the way through verse 31. All of this justification is accomplished without law and works; it is through faith and faith alone.

Once a year, on the great Day of Atonement, the Jewish high priest, and he alone, took the blood from the great altar of burnt offering and went into the Holy of Holies, into which none dared enter but he and he only for the purpose of this function and sprinkled that blood on the cover of the Ark of the Covenant, called the mercy seat, in order to cover the sins of the whole people. In the Ark were deposited the tables of the law, the law which condemned these sins. The mercy seat covered those tablets; but only when it was sprinkled with the expiatory blood did it cover the sins of the people from God and from His punishment. Then going on in this verse there follows what this act of God was to show: *He did this for a demonstration of His righteousness because of His "passing over the sinful acts previously done."* This passing over was taking place all along *"in the forbearance of God, a forbearance;" "in view of the demonstration of His righteousness at the present time."* The word for *forbearance* the way that it is used in this verse means a "temporary suspension of His wrath." This demonstration or pointing out of His righteousness is so plain that it becomes obvious and must be seen. Paul teaches us in this verse that God's righteousness consists in a justifying act of God which declares believers righteous and puts them into a status of being declared righteous. God set forth Christ as the mercy seat in His blood, as a mercy seat through faith in His redemptive work. The sacrifice of Christ did something that the OT sacrifices could not; the sacrifices of Christ provided a remission, the forgiveness of sins which is once and for all for the repentant, taking them away, and it is more than a passing over of skirting of sins. Redemption through Christ's blood provides permanent satisfaction of His justice before the Father.

He chooses to save people through His sovereign grace alone, not because of their good works, **Rom. 11:6; But, if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace. Eph. 1:5-6, He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.** Let's take a closer look at Rom. 11:6: *Then if God has kept a remnant of people for His own it is by His absolutely free expression of His loving kindness toward men finding His only motive and bounty in benevolence, and it no longer has its source from conforming to the Mosaic law, for then His absolutely free expression of His loving kindness toward men is no longer an absolutely free expression of His loving kindness toward men.* God doesn't choose a remnant based on their works, but by His sovereign, electing, grace. These two principles—grace and works—are mutually exclusive. A gift cannot be earned. What is free cannot be bought. What is unmerited cannot be deserved. Fortunately, God's choice was based on grace, not on works; otherwise no one could have ever been chosen. A "remnant" is a word that literally comes from a word that means "lack." In the further meaning it has come to mean "what is left" and when used to describe a person it means "some remaining." The context of this word as used here in this verse means "those remaining faithful to God."

Many of the stories that Jesus told illustrate God's grace, but Jesus Himself is the greatest demonstration of God's grace, ***John 1:14, And the Word became flesh and dwelt (or tabernacled) among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten (or, unique, only one of His kind) from the Father, full of grace and truth.*** We will notice that this verse says that He was *full of grace*; to me personally this points out that not only is He a benevolent God to all of mankind, even those who oppose Him, but also that His grace is distributed fully and equally. Not lacking to anyone and that this is one of His attributes, grace defines Him. As it defines Him, like all of His other attributes so should it also define me, so let's take an amplified look at this verse of John 1:14: *And, in the continuance of God's salvation plan for man, the divine nature of the preincarnate Christ, received a new form, that of a physical body of a man, and He continually, during His physical lifetime, lived in the midst of us, and we continued to view attentively and we contemplate His divine majesty, holiness, excellence, and infinite perfection, divine majesty and holiness just as the unique, one of a kind, one and only person of the Father, abounding in His free expression of loving kindness to men with its only motive being that of benevolence and abounding in gospel truth.* The "Word" became flesh and remains in every sense the Word now made flesh. This Word, being God, could not possibly change into anything else, for then Christ would cease to be God. Christ is spoken of here as the "Word" because He is the mouth piece of God. He is the agent to the man of God, God's exact representative in a man. His mode of operation was to speak everything into existence after the Father's will was made known. It has always been that way even before the creation of the world according to John 1:1. We can spend a lot of time trying to uncover the mystery of how the Word, or the Creator, could assume our created nature, but I'm afraid it would be wasted time because our finite minds cannot grasp what is infinite knowledge. For instance we can't compare the incarnation to the miracle of water changing into wine, which will stifle our minds, because in that miracle the water ceased to be water when it changed into wine; but the Word did not cease to be God when He became flesh...His divine nature did not turn into flesh. There is not an analogy that can be used to explain the incarnation; that one will have to wait until we are joined together in heaven, if after that time we are still interested, which I doubt will be the case because I believe our questions and our curiosities will seem so insignificant compared to observing the glory of the Godhead. My opinion is that we will be so awe struck by His glory that this will get our constant full attention and the things of this age which we cannot explain will cease to interest us in an explanation. The incarnation is absolutely unique—there is nothing like it; only the Son of God has two natures. So it is not correct to teach that God became man at the cost of giving up His divinity. In heaven the Word still has His flesh but at the cost of nothing, nor by any exchange, nor dependent on anything.

When we talk about "flesh" we understand this to mean *the whole man, body and soul*. Christ's flesh was real flesh, born of a human mother. It was not merely the appearance of flesh, as some would teach, that is those who dare to say they have solved the mystery of the

incarnation. But we must keep in mind that while the Word became flesh it did not become sinful flesh as we use to describe the flesh of mankind. Our sin is not in the physical part of our body (flesh) and when we are raised from the dead our flesh will have no sin in it.

Mary gave birth to a son of flesh, whose soul became sorrowful unto death, who groaned in the spirit and in death gave up His spirit commending His spirit into His Father's hands. The manhood of Christ was thus perfect in every respect. On the one hand we cannot take anything away from His flesh, His human nature, the perfect human. On the other hand we cannot take anything away from His divine nature, He is the perfect divinity. These two, each being perfect are combined in the one person, but never intermingling. How is this possible? I can only answer that question with a question...how is it possible that He was never created??? How is it possible that He always existed and will never have an end to His existence nor did he ever have a beginning? We have nothing relative to our human capacity to give us an explanation for these questions and our best answer is to accept these things on the faith that we have in our perfectly truthful God who told us these truths.

John tells us that the first effect of the incarnation is that He dwelt among us; He became the visible God who was previously invisible, the exact representation of God. Previously we could only see the effects of God's presence, much like the wind. We cannot see the wind but we can see the effect of wind. Living among us is related to us with the word "tabernacle" or "tent." This recalls the Tabernacle of Israel in which God tented and dwelt among His people. The pillar of cloud and fire filled and covered the Tabernacle, making visible the glorious presence of God.

The word "tented" indicates a temporary journey. The very nature of tents is one of being portable and never intended to stay in one place. The incarnate Christ only stayed on earth until His redemptive work was finished. Then His "tent" or "flesh" was not discarded but stayed with Him through His glorious ascension on into the Holy of Holies. The second effect of the incarnation that John teaches us is that we beheld His glory. The term "glory" is a word that can be applied to an attribute singularly, or it can be all inclusive of His attributes as they shine forth in one or another way before the eyes of men. So, His glory may designate the radiance of His infinite love that dwelt in Christ as He demonstrated in both word and deed, or the heavenliness of His grace and mercy, or His compassion, or the divine depth and comprehension of His wisdom and knowledge or the absoluteness of His power in all of the miracles He performed that spoke volumes of His divinity. Any one of these could've been the glory that John and the eye-witnesses beheld of the only begotten Son from the Father. The glory that he beheld never fell short of his expectations and in fact exceeded it in every way. One thing we must always remember, as we let John teach us these truths, as we accept these revelations that God has granted us, these divine realities are couched in sin tainted, imperfect

human terms, which allows us to only dimly see the full effect of these incommunicable realities.

God would never have revealed to us what He did concerning the Holy trinity and the inner relationship of all three Persons, knowing that we could not comprehend these divine realities except that it is necessary to our salvation. The Father sending the Son, the Son executing His redemptive mission, and the Holy Spirit appropriating this redemption to us; God knows that this is far beyond our human comprehension, but we need to know these truths to have faith in the justification of man as a depraved sinner. These truths are the sum and substance of our hope. When we talk about the Christ as the “Son” and others being children of God by grace, by adoption, or by the pardon of our sin, it is not the same thing. Jesus is the Son by nature, by the circumstance of His very conception and in this sense He is the “Only Begotten.”

When the Word became flesh, and John along with other witnesses came to see His glory, it was the glory of Christ, there was no glory in the physical make up of the flesh itself. That is to say that the flesh added nothing to Christ’s nature. John and the others beheld the divine glory of the Son as it shone forth in His divine attributes manifested through the veil of His human flesh. What these witnesses beheld was “the glory from the Father,” a glory so great, so truly divine, which resulted from the divine eternal relationship of the Son and the Father. When John says that His glory was “full” of grace and truth, he means that all of what they saw of His glory was the attributes of grace and truth. There was no half-measure, no fraction, but perfect completeness in every thought, word, and deed.

While grace and truth are specifically named, this does not mean that other attributes of the Word were excluded. These two, however, are central to our salvation. Like a stream they flow out to us sinners so that we may possess and enjoy what they bring. Grace, as undeserved favor, connotes sin and guilt on our part which this grace removes by our pardon, justification, and adoption to childhood. The heart of this grace is the redemption in Christ Jesus. Grace is given as a free and unmerited gift, first the gift of pardon and then all that flows from that pardon. Truth is linked with grace and the two are intertwined; truth in grace and grace in truth. Truth is the saving light that John mentions repeatedly in his teachings. The meaning of truth is “reality,” everything as it is and every statement of it in words. Thus the incarnate Word is the full embodiment of saving truth, and His name is both Truth and Light.

Truth is the reality of God’s will, His purpose and plan for our salvation, and every act is in accord with the will of the Father. Both grace and truth intend to kindle, maintain, and increase faith and trust in our hearts. They shine forth, “that believing we might have life through His name,” (John 20:31). It is the epitome of ungratefulness to be met with the fullness of this grace and truth and respond with unbelief.

Jesus Christ demonstrated God's grace not only by the way He lived but particularly by the way He died on the cross, **Gal. 2:21; I do not nullify the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly. Heb. 2:9; But we do see Him who has been made for a little while lower (or, a little lower) than the angels, namely Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.** Some of us may look at this verse in Hebrews 2:9 and find the last few words interesting, that is, "He might taste death for everyone." Through the grace of Christ's physical death He made it possible for us to never "taste" spiritual death, that is, separation from God. In Biblical terms we must remember that "death" signifies "separation" and the separation that is the subject here is separation from God. When Christ paid the penalty for our sin this work made it possible for us to have an uninterrupted fellowship with God. So let's take a closer look at this verse in Galatians and see what other gems may be hidden in this spiritual gold mine: *I do not render null and void the saving grace of God, that is, the pardon of sins and admission into the divine kingdom; because if there is a possibility that the ministration of justification and righteousness comes by way of the Mosaic statutes, it follows that Christ suffered and died to pardon our sins in vain.* The grace of God is seen in His unconditional gift of salvation. When man tries to earn it, he is making God's grace void. He is no longer accepting the gift of grace if he thinks that he has earned it or deserves it. If man could obtain favor with God through Jewish observances, then Christ died for nothing; He literally threw His life away and the nature of God that would have indulged in such sadistic behavior would be drastically different. Christ died so that man could obtain righteousness and there is no other way, not even by the strictest keeping of laws and observances. Through Jesus' death, God is able to forgive freely all who repent of their sins and trust in Him. More than that, God brings them into a right relationship with Himself and declares them righteous. **Rom. 4:5; But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness. Rom. 5:1-2; Therefore having been justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. 1 Cor. 1:4; I thank my God always concerning you, for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus. Titus 2:11; for the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men. Titus 3:4-5; But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and the renewing by the Holy Spirit.** This verse in Titus teaches us how God's mercy saved us from eternal damnation, so let's amplify this verse by looking at the definitions of the spoken Greek as it would have appeared in English in this verse. *But on the other hand when the gentleness of God our Savior, that is the kind of gentleness that pervades His whole nature, mellowing all that would be harsh and austere, understanding that He is the One who also saves us from destruction and danger and brings us*

into state of prosperity and happiness, and His love for mankind appeared to us as the revelation of God in human form; He rescued and preserved us from spiritual death that is common to all men because of Adam's sin. Not on the basis of His performance which he has done in fulfilling the claims of God, but with respect to His compassion, by means of the word of God which causes a spiritual cleansing and a rebirth of the person's soul and making person different than from the past, turning toward God and away from his past life by means of the conviction and baptism of the Holy Spirit. How thankful we can be for the nick-of-time interventions by God to save man from destroying himself. When, in our life experiences, we are in a situation where it seems that all is lost and there is no hope of recovery, God, in His grace, intervenes to save us. Some call it a road block of man's way to hell, I prefer to call it a demonstration of God's love expressed in His abounding mercy and grace. When the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared we were saved from the "destination of hell." It was a manifestation of God's attributes that He would send His Son to die for the world's rebellious sinners. The word that is used here for the meaning of 'love,' in the Greek, has its root from which we get our word "philanthropy." It combines the thoughts of love, graciousness, and compassion. He saved us from the guilt and penalty of all of our sins—past, present, and future. For us they are all future sins that our Savior died and His death covered them all.

But one of the simplest and clearest truths of the gospel is also the most difficult for man to receive. It is that our salvation is not based on anything that we can do to deserve it. One does not become a Christian by living a Christian life. The Christian life is merely the result of being a Christian. It is also not that good people go to heaven, for the Bible tells us that none of us are good enough. The consistent testimony of the Bible is that man cannot earn or merit salvation. Man cannot save himself by good works; if he could then Jesus Christ died in vain. Man's righteous deeds are as polluted rags in God's sight. Man cannot become a Christian by living a Christian life for the simple reason that he has no power within himself to live a Christian life. It is not good people who go to heaven; it is sinners who have been saved by God's grace. Good works do not earn salvation they are a result of salvation. Wherever there is true salvation there will also be good works. So we read in this verse that God did not save us because of our works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy.

Salvation is a work of mercy—not justice. Justice demands that the deserved punishment be administered; mercy provides a righteous way by which the punishment is averted. God saved us by the washing of regeneration. Conversion is a new creation and in this verse that new creation is presented under the figure of a bath. It is the same figure used by the Lord Jesus when He taught the disciples that there is only one bath of regeneration but many necessary cleansings of defilement. That bath of regeneration has nothing to do with baptism. It is not a bodily cleansing by water, but a new creation that has a moral cleansing of

the inner self by the word of God. Baptism is not even a symbol of this bath; it rather depicts burial with Christ into death. Our new birth is also spoken of as a renewing by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God brings about a marvelous transformation—not putting new clothes on an old man but by putting a new man in new clothes. The Holy Spirit is the agent in regeneration and the Word of God is the instrument.

Although salvation is a gift of God’s grace and not a reward for good work, there is no reason for Christians to ignore doing good works (the title “Christian” implies that they would not ignore the good works). They are not free to live as they like or sin as they like; this is not the character of a Christian as described in the Sermon on the Mount). God’s grace continues to work in their lives, giving them the inner power to discipline themselves, to do good, to endure suffering and to triumph over temptation, **Rom. 6:14-15; for sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law, but under grace, What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be! 2 Cor. 12:9; And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me. 2 Tim. 2:1; You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Jesus Christ. Titus 2:11-14; For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus; who gave Himself for us that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.** When we read the verse in 2 Tim. 2:1; it tells us to be strong in grace! So does that mean that God’s grace makes us strong, or that grace is an attribute that should define us? Or is it both? Let’s us amplify this verse and see if we can get some definition of what Paul’s intention is in this teaching: *I pray that you, my friend, accordingly will render services, as did Onesiphorus, and you will be made spiritually strong in your morals, knowing that the power of God is made strong in our weaknesses where grace abounds, and will equip you with the power strong enough to be an ambassador of Christ while remaining in the attitudes and values of the gift of admission to the divine kingdom that is created by Christ Jesus.* Paul, in this verse is telling Timothy and us to remain strong and courageous with the strength that the grace of Jesus Christ provides to us. Go on faithfully for the Lord with the undeserved ability that comes through union with Him. The Lord, in His grace, is the author of this strength, it originates from Him. As with everything else, without Him we have no power. We are so accustomed to His power working constantly in our lives that at times, I think, we forget that our Lord Jesus Christ is constantly out ahead of us, like a snowplow clearing roads for us, that we begin to think, arrogantly, that we are accomplishing things in our own power; that the results we see or expect are an outcome of natural abilities. Thusly we seem to begin to cease or stop having any affect on anything in our life, I believe that this is purposeful, that is, this is God’s way of bringing us back to the realization that we are not

accomplishing anything without Him. This is God's mercy at work through grace! This is His method of saving us from self-deification, which will eventually destroy us and our witness as we have seen so many examples of in the Scriptures. We can carry out the Christian service properly only because God in His grace has given us the ability to do so; **Rom. 12:6, *And since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let each exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith.*** This verse would seem to indicate that the practicing of our gifts, or talents, as long as we keep it in the spiritual realm, is limited only by the depth of our faith. That is, our spiritual abilities are proportional to our faith. Also it would seem that differing gifts require differing amounts of grace depending on where the believer is in his maturity level and the maturity level of those who witness the activation of the gifts; so let's take a closer look at this verse and see if we can be persuaded to increase our faith which will also increase the frequency of use and the depths of our gifts: *Since we, as individuals, serve God diversely, we have firmly in our mind knowledge of gifts imparted to us from the Holy Spirit, that are diverse and originate from the absolutely free expression of the loving kindness of God, which finds its only motive in the bounty and benevolence of the Giver, that was conferred to us; so now let each of us exercise them accordingly: whether it be particularly as an elder watching over the church or the teaching and instructing of God's message that is in conformity with the accepted doctrines of faith, he shall do it in the measure that God has made available to him in light of his ability to believe.* As in our natural body, we have various members with various, distinct, functions, so it is true with the body (members) of believers. One has one faculty and another a different faculty, for example it is the eye's faculty to see, the ear to hear, etc. So it is with the spiritual gifts of each individual church, as there are different members there are different and distinct gifts. The most important fact to remember about these gifts is that they are all of equal importance and they all originate from Christ, as their head, and by the same Spirit to serve the whole body.

None of these gifts are from the effects of nature, that is, the result of human power, diligence, nor industry. They all flow from the grace of God who dispenses these gifts how He see fit, when, where, and to whom He pleases in a free and sovereign manner. Therefore we in the church should acknowledge them as such and use them solely for His glory and for the good of the church and the body of people in the church. These gifts are divided into two parts, which are again divided into more branches. The divisions are made up of the gifts of ministering and prophesying. Prophesying does not mean the foretelling of things to come, although this gift has been bestowed on some, but the preaching of the gospel. Those who have this gift of opening or explaining the Scriptures should make use of it and constantly attend to it. They should prepare for it diligently by prayer, reading, and then meditating and then by taking advantage of every opportunity that presents itself. They should not let any discouragement or difficulty deter them from operating in this gift. If we have this gift we should respond appropriately, not haughtily or with an air superior righteousness.

This verse teaches us that we should act soberly, modestly, humbly, according to degree and depth as our faith. We cannot prophesy without faith. A man must believe and thus have confidence in what he is preaching. He should not be skeptical, or doubtful about what he believes. The whole scope of the text should be considered and if he picks out a verse to make a point he should also include the previous and next verse connected to it. It would also be good to find other passages to help support his point, but these other verses must also adhere to the same rules.

God exercised His grace towards believers before they were born. That same grace operates continually towards them throughout life and will continue to be active towards them throughout the ages to come, ***Gal. 1:15; But when He who had set me apart, even from my mother's womb, and called me through His grace, Rom. 5:2; whom we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. Rom. 5:21; as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Eph. 2:7; in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Jesus Christ. 1 Tim. 1:12-16; I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service; even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. And yet I was shown mercy, because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus. It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. And yet for this reason I found mercy, in order that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience, as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.*** I believe that these verses in 1 Tim. 1:12-16 should be my prayer every time that I engage in ministry. It is a humbling statement putting all of the credit where all of the credit is due. So let's take this verse apart a little bit to get a more appreciative understanding of Paul's profound statements: *I give thanks to the Messiah my Savior, my Sovereign Lord, who has made me morally strong through the power of God which is made manifest through my weaknesses, because He thought of me as being trustworthy, appointing me into the ministry of teaching divine things; even though I was, prior to this, a person that uttered words against God and divine things and a persecutor, and also a person who mistreated others for pleasure which the affliction of the wrong brought them. And yet I was spared of the deserved punishment for these things and shown mercy, for my habitual and repeated behavior of foolishly not believing in the God of promise. And also He showed to me His unmerited favor that was exceedingly abundant, with the appropriating of what God in Christ has for man, resulting in a transformation of man's character and way of life and with affectionate regard for man which is found in Christ Jesus. This statement that I make is a believable teaching, and has inherent value worthy of speaking confidently and boldly, and that is, that Christ Jesus came to appear before men to rescue and*

preserve them from spiritual death; among which I am ranked as the worst. But through this I felt compassion from God, that in me, first of all as a great sinner, that Jesus Christ might show forth His unlimited self restraint in His attitude toward all humans before proceeding to action of judgment, as a pattern for all of those who are destined to trust in God for their future existence of constant abiding with God. In this verse Paul is expressing his gratitude for the call that went out to him from Jesus Christ to be a preacher of the Word of God. I believe that this verse should be at least a part of every person's opening prayer as they begin ministry, no matter what that ministry may be. This verse should give us an attitude of humility because it recognizes first of all that all true ministries are a call from Jesus Christ. This is especially true if He calls us to a place that takes away our comfort zone. Ideally if we are not comfortable, in the beginning, we will soon recognize that all the strength that we have, including wisdom, knowledge, and understanding to minister did not come from within.

Also we cannot claim any of the success that results from the ministry. He will quite often choose our weaknesses to be an area of ministry so that he can then provide for us whatever it is that we need to minister and through His power make us strong in that area. We see a proof example of Him choosing to take us out of our comfort zone in Moses when God called upon him to lead the Israelites out of Egypt (Ex. 4:10-31). So the subject of this verse in 1 Tim. is Paul's gratitude to Christ for being called, or chosen to the ministry of the word and his own salvation. His gratitude extends also to Christ for providing all of his needs during this time. Paul tells us in his letters that he has lived in mansions and slept outside, he has eaten at banquets and he has settled for food that had been discarded, but in one shape or another he has always had his needs fulfilled by his Lord.

While others were prideful of being teachers and called doctors of the law, he esteemed it a high honor and special favor bestowed upon him that he was a preacher of the Gospel. He recognized that all of the gifts that he had to perform his ministry did not come from within him or from other men, but they were a free gift and manifestation of God's mercy on him. So this caused him to not glory in his gifts but to glorify in the Giver of the gifts.

We don't have to read Paul's letters too far to know that Paul truly had a gift to preach and any normal man could've pride-fully claimed these accomplishments for and of himself. In this Christ counted him faithful having made him very good at what he did through grace and He kept him humble in His grace, with faithfulness being a necessary requisite and qualification for a preacher of the Gospel. Paul did not trust in his own wisdom and knowledge for the ministry of the word, the work of the ministry, preaching of the Gospel, or the training of others in this ministry, but trusted in being lead by the Holy Spirit to speak what he preached and to go where he was needed. Paul reminds us from whence he came in this next verse and

the purpose of mentioning it is not to edify his position, but to show us the depths and the true abundance of God's grace and mercy in his life which can also be a part of our life.

The fact that Paul had broken all of the Ten Commandments before his conversion is abundantly clear in this verse. He speaks of himself as a former blasphemer, persecutor, and an insolent man. As a blasphemer he spoke evil concerning Christians and their leader, Jesus Christ. As a persecutor, he sought to put Christians to death because he felt that this new sect posed a threat to his Judaism. In carrying out his evil plan, he took delight in committing disdainful, violent, and outrageous acts against the believers. Although it is not obvious from the English translation, there is an ascending scale of wickedness in these lists of acts of blasphemer, persecutor, and insolence. The first sin is a matter of words only. The second describes suffering inflicted on others for their religious beliefs. The third includes the idea of cruelty and abuse. But we must not miss the point of Paul's teaching here. It is not to bring self-degradation on him; it is to show us that God's mercy was not thwarted by these acts. He did not receive the punishment he deserved; because he did these things in the ignorance of his unbelief.

In persecuting Christians, he thought he was doing God's service. Since his parent's religion taught the worship of the One True God, he could only conclude that the Christian faith was opposed to the Jehovah of the OT. With all the zeal and energy he possessed, he sought to defend the honor of God by persecuting the Christians. Many persons insist that zeal and earnestness and sincerity are the important things with God. But Paul's example shows that zeal is not enough. In fact, if a man is wrong, his zeal only makes the wrong more intense. The more zeal he has, the more damage he does. Not only did Paul escape the punishment he deserved, and not only had he received mercy from God, but he also received abundant kindness and compassion which he did not deserve, that is in God's grace.

Where his sin has abounded, God's grace had abounded much more. The fact that the grace of the Lord was not bestowed on Paul in vain is indicated by the words *with faith and love which are in Jesus Christ*. The grace which came to Paul was accompanied by faith and love which are in Jesus Christ. It could, of course, mean that just as grace came from the Lord, so faith and love found their origin from Him. But the meaning seems to be clearer if we understand that God's grace was not refused by Paul, but that he responded by trusting the Lord Jesus and by loving the Lord, the One whom he had formerly hated.

These verses are a faithful saying because it is the word of God, who can neither lie nor be mistaken. Men can afford to believe this statement with implicit trust. Indeed, to disbelieve it is unreasonable and unwise. It is worthy of all acceptance because it applies to all, tells what God has done for all, and extends the gift of salvation to all. Christ Jesus emphasizes the deity

of our Lord. The One who came from heaven to earth was the first of all God and then *man*. The preexistence of the Savior is suggested in the words *He came into the world*.

Bethlehem was not the beginning of His existence. He had dwelt with God the Father from all eternity, but He came into the world as a Man on a specific errand. Our calendars testify to the fact that He came; we speak of this as A.D. 20--, the year of our Lord 20--. But why did He come? He came to save sinners. It was not to save good people (there were none); if there were good people they would not be in need of a Savior. Neither was it to save those who kept the law perfectly (no one had done this either). So here we come to the very heart of the difference between a Christian and all other teachings. False religions tell us that there is something that we can do to gain favor with God. The gospel tells man that he is a sinner, that he is lost, that he cannot save himself, and that the only way that he can get to heaven is through the substitutionary work of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross. False religions teach exactly what man wants to hear, namely that he can somehow contribute to his own salvation. But the gospel insists that all the glory for the work of salvation must go to Christ alone, that man does nothing but sinning, and that the Lord Jesus does all the saving.

The Spirit of God brought Paul to the place where he realized he was the chief of all sinners, or as some translate it: *a foremost one among sinners*. If he was not the chief of sinners, then certainly he was in the front rank. Notice that the title “chief of sinners” is not given to a man steeped in idolatry or immorality, but rather to a deeply religious man, one who had been brought up in an orthodox Jewish home! His sin was doctrinal; he did not accept the word of God concerning the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Rejection of the Son of God made him equal to the man-made sin status of being “the chief of all sinners.” As a side note he says *of whom I am chief—not was chief*. The godliest saints are often the most conscience of their own sinfulness. I believe that Paul calls himself the “chief of all sinners” for our sake. We can plainly see all that Paul has accomplished in his life and by referring to himself as the chief it gives us hope and a realization that if the grace of God can work in a man that is the chief of all sinners God can provide the grace to accomplish all or more than Paul did.

We will notice that Paul’s practice was to begin and end each of his letters by speaking of the grace of God, or the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. In this way he indicated that he was always conscious that the believer’s whole life is lived in an atmosphere of God’s grace, ***Rom. 1:7; to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Rom.16:20; And the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Cor. 16:23; The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Gal. 6:18; The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brethren, amen.*** We should not be confused or in any way think that Paul had the power

to dispense God's grace. Paul is merely reminding us that as believers we are living under God's mercy and grace. Let's take an amplified look at Gal. 6:18: *May the favor, goodwill, and benevolence of God and Christ as exercised toward men continually be in the present company of your mind, brethren, in truth.* As we can see by the references, the wishing or desiring of grace for the brethren was often used at the end of Paul's letters. He wishes that more gifts of grace might be bestowed on them; that the Gospel of the grace of God might be continued with them. He prays that the love of Christ might be shown in their hearts everywhere they go. His blessing is that many might receive out of the fullness of His grace an increase and exercise of it to quicken, strengthen, and comfort them. This will free them from the desire to satisfy their carnal appetites and temptation to be sucked into the dangers of legalism.

Grace, when received by faith, transforms man and causes him to love and to seek after the righteousness of God. We can see in this statement that "transforming grace" is conditional; it is based on the willingness of the recipient to receive it by faith. So we must look to see what we mean by "faith" and we find it in **Hebrews 11:1, now faith is the assurance, of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.** Translated from the literal Greek and amplified to English this verse says this: *But there is such a thing as the persuasion and conviction of faith that is not the outcome of the imagination but what gives substance to and is based on facts such as the resurrection of Christ and is the proof of things that we expect and desire; the certain persuasion of things that exist but remain for now not seen that are in the future.* The condition is this then; our we assured; i.e., do we have the kind of faith that has the *undoubting* confidence in what we trust in or rely on? Our we certainly persuaded in God's willingness to provide to us what we need, even though we cannot see Him or His power at work? We can see the results of these things, but we can't actually see the power or the person of Jesus Christ. Much like when the wind blows, we can't see the wind, but we can see the evidence of its presence by the swaying of the trees and the blowing of the leaves. If we have this kind of faith we will receive His grace, as a gift, and we will naturally be transformed into a person of love, because everything from God has love as the foundation of its substance, as we learn throughout the NT. It only makes sense that if we pursue a relationship with God we are going to seek after His grace and have a desire to show evidence of that grace in our own life, as Christ did in His life, because there is nothing about God that is not compassionate, that is, merciful and gracious.

Are we capable of losing this grace? If we read verses out of context, such as **Gal. 5:4; You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.** We might come to believe that we can lose God's grace. This text is often misused as a teaching that one can fall from God's saving grace. But, the passage must be read in its total context. In verse one; **Gal. 5:1; it was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.** In this verse Paul is

speaking about the freedom that the believer has in Christ Jesus. In verse 2; ***Gal. 5:2; behold, I Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you.*** Of course, this circumcision is referring to the Jewish Law; but in this verse he says that if a person trusts in the ordinance of circumcision as more important than trusting in Christ, then Christ will be of no effect. Then in verse ***Gal. 5:3; and I testify again to every man who receives circumcision that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law.*** Here he tells the Galatians that if one is forced to keep one part of the law, he must keep all it, and this is impossible. So then, we come to verse 4 as read above. In this verse he is speaking about those who justify themselves in or by means of the law or through the law. Naturally, if they believe in justification in or through the law, they will have no room for Jesus Christ and His grace. The exact translation of this verse is *“You were rendered useless as far as Christ is concerned.”* In other words, you were cut off from Christ, not that you belonged to Him at any time; you were never His. Believing that the law was enough to justify you, you never allowed yourself to participate in grace.

The second part of the verse says, “You who are seeking to be justified by law.” This can refer to the Law of Moses or any other law. Your presumed justification depends, Paul says, on keeping a particular law or set of rules, and you are justified by and before the law. But this does not mean that you are justified before God, because His justification requires the standard set by Him, in and through Christ.

And then, the third sentence which Paul gives is “you have fallen from grace.” The verb, translated as “have fallen” in the Greek means “to fall off.” It does not mean that you lost the grace of God that was yours at one time, but that you are off the path of grace since you chose justification by law instead of justification by grace. The two steps, justification in and through the law and justification in and through grace, are two parallel lines that never meet. To be justified by both law and grace is impossible. “Grace has a law entitled it, but the law has no grace.” This expression actually means that you could not be justified by grace since you sought your justification in or through the law or set of rules. The conclusion then is that no, we cannot lose our grace; once we belong to Christ no one nor nothing can take us away; we must be careful though, as we evaluate ourselves, that we do, indeed, belong to Christ!

