

The Purpose and Plan of the Eons

Volume 3

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by

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Dedicated to our beloved brethren in Ghana.

I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3.14)

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THE PURPOSE AND PLAN OF THE EONS

To me, less than the least of all saints, was granted this grace: to bring the evangel of the untraceable riches of Christ to the nations, and to enlighten all as to what is the administration of the secret, which has been concealed from the eons in God, Who creates all, that now may be made known to the sovereignties and the authorities among the celestials, through the ecclesia, the multifarious wisdom of God,

**in accord with the purpose of the eons, which He makes in
Christ Jesus, our Lord;**

in Whom we have boldness and access with confidence,
through His faith.

(Ephesians 3.8-12 cv)

PREFACE

Volumes 1 and 2 present the foundation for understanding God's purpose worked out in the eons through Christ Jesus, our Lord and Savior.

The purpose of God will be achieved when all things in the heavens and on the earth have been summed up in Christ, which will occur in the fullness of times or, what is called, the consummation of the eons.

Christ has been raised from among the dead and seated at the right hand of God among the celestials, up over every sovereignty and authority and power and lordship, and every name that is named, not only in this eon, but also in that which is impending. In the capacity of Head, God has subjected all under His feet, and has given Him, as Head over all, to the ecclesia which is His body, the complement of the One completing the all in all (see Ephesians 1.20-22 *cv*). Christ is the Head of all and the Head of His body, and He will fulfill the purpose of the eons through His body. This is a profound truth.

Volume 3 continues by building on this truth.

May the eyes of your heart be enlightened!

THE PURPOSE AND PLAN OF THE EONS

In all wisdom and insight He made known to us **the mystery of His will**, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is,

the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth.

(Ephesians 1.7-10 NASB)

1. THE ALL *IN* CHRIST

In our quest to understand the purpose of the eons, we must be ever mindful of the fact that the Son of God, Christ Jesus, our Lord, is the Origin and the Consummation of the eons. The eons began in Him and will end in Him. Christ will head up all, but He is also the sum of all. He is like a great magnet that will draw all in heaven and on earth unto Himself. All creation and all that God has purposed and planned will be summed up and headed up *in* Christ to the glory of God, the Father of all.

Now, for those who believe in Jesus in this present eon, righteousness, justification, reconciliation, resurrection, ascension and glorification, along with eonian life and immortality, all come forth from the finished work of Christ. These are the pillars of the truth upon which our faith and hope rest. These are not simply terms that stand apart from the One who has paid the price to make them a reality to believers. *In* Christ and *through* Christ, believers find **righteousness, justification, reconciliation** and, eventually, **resurrection, transfiguration and glorification**. Or, another way of stating these truths is that **Christ is our redemption; Christ is our righteousness; Christ is our sanctification; Christ is our resurrection and life; Christ is our glorification**. Because of Christ, believers are a new creation *in* Christ, destined for eonian life and immortality. Believers are members of the ecclesia, which is Christ's body that is destined to reign with Christ among the celestials in the coming eons and beyond.

Can you think or imagine of anything greater than what God's Son has accomplished on the cross for those who have been called and chosen from before the disruption of the world?

Through Paul, the apostle of the nations, we see Christ as all in all. Christ is the very foundation and, we could say, superstructure of the evangel presented to us by Paul. Christ Jesus, our Lord, is central and preeminent in the evangel that was given to Paul by revelation directly from the Lord Jesus. Remove Christ from this evangel and there is no good news. This evangel begins with the cross of Calvary, for this is where the old humanity was crucified *with* Christ and a new humanity was brought forth *in* Christ.

Unfortunately, many believers seem to see their salvation as simply being saved from their sins and one day going to heaven. In other words, they have been saved from something. Of course, some erroneously believe they have been saved from Christendom's hell (an eternal torture chamber), which, as has been stressed, does not exist. We are saved from the wrath of God, which is an entirely different matter, for it refers to the judgment that will be poured out on an unbelieving world at the end of the present eon and, possibly, the great white throne judgment that leads to the second death at the end of the next eon.

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There is nothing wrong with thanking Jesus for saving us. We need to praise Him. Praise God for His people who simply praise and worship Jesus for saving them. But let us take our praise and worship to the heights of glory.

What is so often sadly missed is what believers are saved *into*. It is good to be saved from sin and the wrath of God, but if this is all that salvation means to us, then we have come way short of God's purpose for saving us, which is a vital part of the purpose of the eons.

We who believe in this eon are saved into something so glorious that it should bring adoration, praise and worship from our hearts each and every day of our life until Jesus comes for us at His presence. In that glorious day, we will worship Him and never stop worshipping Him for who He is and what He has accomplished, not only for us but for all mankind and creation.

We are saved *in* Christ and saved into His destiny to head up all in the heavens and on the earth. We are to be His complement. When we believe, we are placed *in* Christ, forever secure in the One who alone has immortality today, as we wait for the day when He brings His entire body into immortality and eventually all mankind, to the glory of God. Oh, we need the eyes of our heart enlightened by the spirit of God so that we can see more clearly the glory of Christ.

The word *in* is so small and seems so insignificant but when it is seen in the light of Christ, it becomes a mighty word.

In Christ.

One of Paul's most often used expressions is *in Christ*. Peter was the only other one to use this exact expression and he used it three times in his first epistle. Depending on the translation, the expression *in Christ* was used by Paul over eighty times, which places a great deal of emphasis on being *in* Christ. If we include the expression *in* Him, there are well over one hundred references in Paul's epistles.

The fact of the matter is that *in* Christ is the foundation of Paul's evangel. Paul saw *all in Christ!* It starts with those who believe in Jesus and eventually will extend to all mankind and creation itself—*Christ all in all*.

By God's own doing you (believers) are in Christ (1 Corinthians 1.30). *In* Christ is a positional statement of fact. All that we are and all that we will be is based on the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is because of Him and Him alone that we have life and hope for a glorious destiny. Miss this fact and you will miss the glory of Paul's evangel to the nations.

To prove this point, the following is a list of *in* Christ expressions given to us by Paul. In these verses, we discover the breadth, the length, the height and the depth of all that is *in* Christ, for all mankind but especially for believers.

THE ALL *IN* CHRIST

The purpose of the eons is carried out *in* Christ (Ephesians 3.11).
All will be headed up *in* Christ (Ephesians 1.10).
The entire creation of God is *in* Christ (Colossians 1.16).
All has its cohesion *in* Christ (Colossians 1.17).
God conciliated the world to Himself *in* Christ (2 Corinthians 5.19).
The promises of God are *in* Christ (2 Corinthians 1.20).
Redemption is *in* Christ (Romans 3.24; 1 Corinthians 1.30; Ephesians 1.7).
Salvation is *in* Christ (1 Corinthians 1.30; 2 Timothy 2.10).
Grace is *in* Christ and granted *in* Christ (2 Timothy 1.9; 2.1).
Life is *in* Christ (Romans 6.11; Colossians 3.4; 2 Timothy 1.1).
The gracious gift of eonian life is *in* Christ (Romans 6.23).
Faith and love are *in* Christ (2 Timothy 1.13).
Righteousness is *in* Christ (1 Corinthians 1.30; 2 Corinthians 5.21).
Justification by faith is *in* Christ (Galatians 2.16-17).
Sanctification is *in* Christ (1 Corinthians 1.30).
Freedom from the law of sin and death is *in* Christ Jesus (Romans 8.2).
The ecclesias are *in* Christ (1 Thessalonians 2.14).
The new creation is *in* Christ (2 Corinthians 5.17; Galatians 6.15).
Being called and chosen of God is *in* Him (Christ) (Ephesians 1.4).
The one body is *in* Christ (Romans 12.5).
There is no condemnation for those who are *in* Christ (Romans 8.1).
Saints are *in* Christ (Ephesians 1.1; Philippians 1.1; Colossians 1.2).
Faithfulness is *in* Christ (Ephesians 1.1; Colossians 1.2).
Nothing can separate us from the love of God *in* Christ (Romans 8.39).
The upward call of God is *in* Christ (Philippians 3.14).
God's will is *in* Christ (1 Thessalonians 5.18).
The peace of God guards hearts and minds *in* Christ (Philippians 4.7).
Confidence is *in* Christ (Philemon 1.8).
Approval is *in* Christ (Romans 16.10).
Hope is *in* Christ (1 Corinthians 15.19; 1 Timothy 1.1).
Death for believers is *in* Christ (1 Corinthians 15.18; 1 Thessalonians 4.15-16).
Triumph is *in* Christ (2 Corinthians 2.14).
God's workmanship is created *in* Christ (Ephesians 2.10).
Being raised up and seated among the celestials is *in* Christ (Ephesians 2.6).
Every spiritual blessing among the celestials is *in* Christ (Ephesians 1.3).
Fellow partakers of the promise are *in* Christ (Ephesians 3.6).
Encouragement is *in* Christ (Philippians 2.1).
Ways are *in* Christ (1 Corinthians 4.17).
The truth is *in* Christ (2 Corinthians 11.10).
Completeness (fullness) is *in* Christ (Colossians 2.10).

Is it any wonder that our boast is *in* Christ Jesus, our Lord?

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Of course, much could be written about each verse, but let us look at one in particular.

Complete in Christ.

According to Paul, we who believe are complete *in* Christ! Notice that in the two translations of the same verse this is not a future tense, as if we *will* be complete. We *are* complete!

For in Him the entire complement of the Deity is dwelling bodily. And **you are complete in Him....** (Colossians 2.9-10 *CV*)

For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, and in him **ye are made full....** (Colossians 2.9-10 *ASV*)

First, we must see that the entire complement or fullness of the Deity dwells *in* Christ. What does this mean? It means that if we see Christ, we see God. The Son of God is the complement or the exact image or reflection of His Father. The full expression of the Deity is dwelling bodily *in* Christ. Christ Jesus is the full Man; He is the complete Man. He is the Man after God's heart who is the Head of every sovereignty and authority.

Second, Christ is the Man who has brought forth an entirely new creation that is His complement. *In* Christ, believers are made full or complete. In other words, there is nothing partial for those who are *in* Christ. His body is not part old humanity and part new humanity. His body is and will be an entirely new creation in Christ, filled with Christ. Absolutely nothing is lacking in those who believe *in* Christ, for everything of Christ has been given to the ecclesia, which is His body. By God's own doing the body is fully and completely *in* Christ and filled with all that is *in* Christ. This is why Paul declared that Christ is *Head over all, to the ecclesia which is His body, the complement of the One completing the all in all* (Ephesians 1.22b-23 *CV*). This work of completing the all in all begins with His body that has been made complete *in* Him. If we could see the body that Christ sees today, we would see the complement of Christ, a body that is filled with His life.

Today, it seems as if we see everything but His complement; fear not, for it is not what we see but what He sees that matters.

In his Colossians epistle, Paul continued to unveil this great truth.

Who is the Head of every sovereignty and authority, in Whom you were circumcised also with a circumcision not made by hands, in the stripping off of the body of flesh in the circumcision of Christ. Being entombed together with Him in baptism, in Whom you were roused together also through faith in the operation of God, Who rouses Him from among the dead, you also being dead to the offenses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He vivifies

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us together jointly with Him, dealing graciously with all our offenses, erasing the handwriting of the decrees against us, which was hostile to us, and has taken it away out of the midst, nailing it to the cross, stripping off the sovereignties and authorities, with boldness He makes a show of them, triumphing over them in it. (Colossians 2.10b-15 cv)

Christ is the fulfillment of the law and the end of all religion. Judaism had its purpose, but it was a shadow of what is accomplished through God's Son. The shed blood of Christ has done away with decrees and shadows. Believers in His finished work have been released from religion and brought into a glorious relationship *in* Christ.

All who believe have been identified with Christ's death, burial and resurrection. Circumcision, which signifies Christ's death, is the cutting off of the flesh. Baptism signifies both Christ's burial and resurrection. Christ has done all the work, and believers, as His complement, are identified with Christ's circumcision, baptism and resurrection. Everything that stood against us and was hostile to us has been taken out of the way *in* Christ and the way has been made for every believer to be complete *in* Christ, to be completely full *of* Christ, to be His complement through and through. What tremendous good news we are given through Paul!

Let us not stop at this point, for Paul not only used the expression *in* Christ but he also used the expressions *with* Christ, *of* Christ, *by* Christ, *for* Christ and *through* Christ. It is as if Paul sought to exhaust every expression he could to reveal Christ.

With Christ.

Not only are believers *in* Christ but they are *with* Christ.

Those who believe in Christ in this eon have died and their lives are hidden *with* Christ in God (Colossians 3.3); have been crucified *with* Christ (Galatians 2.20); have died *with* Christ to the elementary principles of the world (Colossians 2.20); have been made alive together *with* Christ (Ephesians 2.5); have been raised up *with* Christ (Colossians 3.1); are clothed *with* Christ (Galatians 3.27); shall live *with* Christ (Romans 6.8); will be *with* Christ in the resurrection (Philippians 1.23); are fellow heirs *with* Christ (Romans 8.17).

Notice that we are *with* Christ from death to resurrection life.

Of Christ.

Everything in Paul's life was connected to Christ in some manner. He saw himself and others as servants *of* Christ (1 Corinthians 4.1), members *of* Christ's body (1 Corinthians 6.15), a fragrance *of* Christ to God (2 Corinthians 2.15), imitators *of* Christ (1 Corinthians 11.1), even prisoners *of* Christ, if necessary to bring glory to

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God (Ephesians 3.1). The love *of* Christ controlled or constrained Paul (2 Corinthians 5.14).

By Christ.

For *by* Christ all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities (Colossians 1.16). Paul was laid hold of by Christ (Philippians 3.12).

For Christ.

Christ died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but *for* Him (Christ) who died and rose again on their behalf (2 Corinthians 5.15). Living for Christ means we are to be ambassadors *for* Christ (2 Corinthians 5.20).

Through Christ.

There is only one Lord, by whom are all things, and we exist *through* Christ (1 Corinthians 8.6). We have been reconciled to God *through* Christ (2 Corinthians 5.18; Colossians 1.20). We have access to God *through* Christ (Ephesians 2.18). We can do all things *through* Christ (Philippians 4.13). We overwhelmingly conquer *through* Christ (Romans 8.37). We are saved from the wrath of God *through* Christ (Romans 5.9). God will judge the secrets of men *through* Christ (Romans 2.16).

Of course, these are only lists, partial ones at best, of what Scripture reveals about the finished work of Christ and what Christ means to those who believe. Do you see the significance of Christ for your salvation, for your life while in a body of humiliation and for your destiny? He is not merely a figure who died on a cross and is now seated in heaven. He is far more than this, for God has set Him over all that He might be all in all. Everything of value to God is in His beloved Son, and everything of value to us in this eon and for all the eons to follow is in His Son. We must not separate ourselves or anything we do from Christ. The fact of the matter is that we have no work apart from Christ; we have no life apart from Christ; and we have no destiny apart from Christ. We have everything pertaining to God *in* Christ.

Absolute security.

Do you grasp the greatness of this little expression *in* Christ? We could say that all the other expressions are summed up *in* Christ. Everything that we are or will be is found *in* Christ. Remove Christ from our life and we are nothing but dead men walking. Praise God; once we are *in* Christ, nothing, absolutely nothing can remove us from this secure place.

Today, the world is in much turmoil and many live in fear and great uncertainty of the future. Jesus said it would be this way as our present eon comes to an end

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and He arrives for His people. However, let us not be insecure in these days of darkness. *In Christ* is the most secure place in the entire universe. *In Christ* is as secure as the throne of God is secure. *In Christ* is as secure as the unshakeable kingdom of God is secure. We never have to fear failure or disappointment once we are *in Christ*. Jesus never fails and never disappoints, to the glory of God. We can go through any trial, tribulation, suffering, or great uncertainty knowing that we are *in Christ* and that all is being worked out according to the purpose of God. All that has been purposed *in Christ* will come to God's end and be in accord with God's purpose.

Positional truth.

In Christ is what could be called a positional truth, which means that believers are afforded the highest and grandest advantage before God, not that they have anything to offer God or that they have done anything to deserve such advantage. It is all by grace; all because of God's Son, who He is, and what He has done.

In Christ is not something mystical or even mysterious. It is simply how God sees things. When He sees the ecclesia, which is the body of Christ, He sees His Son. All the advantages of the Son become the advantages of His body. At the consummation of the eons when all is headed up in Christ, God the Father will see His Son who fills all.

Objective and absolute truth.¹

In Christ is what also could be called an objective and absolute truth. Objective and absolute truth is essential in these last days of darkness and systematic deception. Putting on the panoply of God in our spiritual battle with the powers of darkness among the celestials requires that we gird our loins with truth (Ephesians 6.14). We must hold to the truth by faith. We must believe it in the absence of any confirmation and in the midst of great trial and battle that would say otherwise.

Unfortunately, in our current day, truth is not considered objective or absolute. Instead, truth is subjective and relative. Truth is what one thinks truth should be, based on one's own experience and interpretation, and on what one wants it to be. Sadly, this same thinking has crept into the minds of many believers of our day. The result is that, apart from some basic truths, Scripture is often interpreted as one sees fit. When a believer comes along and declares that God's word contains the objective and absolute truth of God, the person is chided for holding to such a belief. The objection is raised: "How can you say that what you believe is the objective and absolute truth of God when there are so many other interpretations of Scripture by so many good men of God? Surely, everyone else cannot be wrong!" I wonder how Paul would answer such a charge if he were alive

¹ In this context, *objective truth* refers to a truth that is independent of the mind. It is from God alone. *Absolute truth* refers to the actual and real truth from God. It is the complete truth to which nothing can be added and from which nothing can be taken.

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today. Surely, in his mind, the truth of the word of God was objective and absolute.

There is another danger regarding truth; it can remain merely head knowledge that does not produce a change in our lives. Yes, we are saved by grace through faith, and by God's own doing we have been placed *in* Christ. However, as great as the truth of *in* Christ is, if we are not careful, this expression can become like so many other expressions and thoughts contained in Scripture. We can memorize them, recite them, and add them to our growing list of truths, and yet never come into the reality of what they truly mean. Do they produce change in our lives?

I can honestly state that when I first saw that I was *in* Christ, it changed my life. I can also state that coming into an understanding of the purpose of the eons and the eventual reconciliation of all mankind has been life-changing for me by bringing me into the freedom *of* Christ as I have never known it in nearly twenty-five years. The truth will make you free (John 8.32) is the promise of our Lord. For freedom Christ set us free (Galatians 5.1). This is not freedom for licentiousness or sin. No; it is freedom to love Jesus, to live for Jesus, to long for Jesus, to serve Jesus, to be passionate for Jesus, and to love all mankind.

Once we believers see the objective and absolute truth of God, we can tenaciously hold to it without wavering and without doubt. We can stand in it and be strong in the Lord and the strength of His might. When the enemy throws accusations our way to try to convince us that we are not the Lord's, or that we are not saved, or that we might be rejected by God, we can stand up to these lies and declare without hesitation that we are *in* Christ, the most secure place in all the universe. When we are confronted with the vilest sinner on the face of the earth and are tempted to write the person off as if there is no hope, we can declare that *in* Christ God is not reckoning his offenses to him and that one day even this one will willingly bow his knee and confess with his tongue that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God, the Father. Even this one will be *in* Christ, even if it is thousands of years into the future at the consummation of the eons.

Praise God!

In conclusion, the purpose of the eons is carried out *in* Christ Jesus our Lord as all in heaven and on earth are headed up *in* Christ so that God may be *All* in all. The eons were made *through* Christ (Hebrews 1.2) to accomplish God's purpose. If we want to understand the eons, we must apprehend Christ. The purpose of the eons will be achieved when *all* is *in* Christ.

May we give God the glory for what He is accomplishing *in* Christ Jesus, His Son and our Lord!

2. THE RICHES OF CHRIST

Paul's passion was to *gain* Christ, to be *found in* Christ, to *know* Christ and to be *complete* in Christ. There was no other life for Paul but the life of Christ.

It is interesting that when He walked this earth, Jesus told His disciples to follow Him. They were commanded to literally follow their Master as He walked this earth. But what does this mean to us today? Are we to follow Christ? How do we follow Jesus who, by His spirit, has taken up residence in us? I submit that we do not follow the Lord in this day. We allow Him, by His spirit, to lead us, which is an entirely different matter. Think about this: When we follow someone, all that we see is the person's backside; we do not see the person's face. We are not called into seeing His backside. We are called into a very personal relationship with Christ, a heart to heart or spirit to spirit relationship.

Paul is our example and he was not following the Lord; in spirit he was seeing Him face to face. He was alive *in* the Lord and the Lord was alive *in* him, and believers are to be in the same relationship.

You see, through Paul the evangel of Christ rises to the height of glory. Those who believe in this wicked eon are a new creation *in* Christ and, as such, they have a new life in them that leads them by the spirit. For us who believe, we do not follow this life; we allow this life to lead us as we live by this life. We are to walk in this life. As Paul wrote: *As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him* (Colossians 2.6 NASB).

Now, there is another aspect of this life as revealed to us through Paul. It is what Paul called the riches of Christ. Today, many people, including believers, are in hot pursuit of riches, the wealth of the world. But those who have been called and chosen to be among the celestials have been brought into all the riches of Christ. We could say that believers are the richest people in the entire universe.

The untraceable riches of Christ.

To me, less than the least of all saints, was granted this grace: **to bring the evangel of the untraceable riches of Christ to the nations**, and to enlighten all as to what is **the administration of the secret**, which has been concealed from the eons in God, Who creates all, that now may be made known to the sovereignties and the authorities among the celestials, through the ecclesia, **the multifarious wisdom of God, in accord with the purpose of the eons, which He makes in Christ Jesus, our Lord**; in Whom we have boldness and access with confidence, through His faith. (Ephesians 3.8-12 cv)

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Paul called his evangel the untraceable riches of Christ. Some translations use the word *unsearchable* in the place of *untraceable*. *Unsearchable* implies that the riches cannot be searched out or discovered, but Paul discovered these riches so they cannot be thought of as unsearchable to the believer today. Some commentators see the word *unsearchable* as meaning that the riches of Christ are so vast that we will be forever searching out and discovering these riches. Without a doubt, we will be forever discovering more and more of our Lord Jesus; so in this regard, I agree.

However, the word *untraceable* gives us another dimension that refers to the evangel Paul was given to dispense to the nations. It most likely means that the riches of Christ cannot be traced to the Hebrew prophets; that is, they cannot be discovered in Hebrew Scripture. This makes Paul's evangel quite unique and special for those called into it.

If we remain within the context of the above verses, we will see how unique his evangel truly is. I have gone over this ground many times in other writings, but as Paul wrote, it is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you (Philippians 3.1).

I am reminded of the time that I spoke on Ephesians at a conference in Ghana, after which I received a written question: "Why are you telling us these things? We only want to worship God." The answer is simple. When we see the riches of Christ, lavish worship springs forth from our heart.

Paul, the least of the saints, was given grace to dispense this evangel. The risen and glorified Jesus appeared to him on multiple occasions and revealed the riches of Christ contained in the evangel to the nations. It was a secret that was hidden from the eons. This in itself gives us the explanation for the word *untraceable*. No one could trace it throughout all the eons that have preceded our current one. Not even the angels or any of God's created beings among the celestials were ever made privy to this secret. It was revealed to Paul alone. What grace we see in the revelation of this secret through Paul!

Just think about this: In the vastness of God's universe there was only one man chosen to reveal God's secret, and he had persecuted Jesus, the Son of God.

The major part of the secret revealed to Paul and dispensed to us is about Christ and the ecclesia, which is His body, in relation to all God's created beings among the celestials. Through the ecclesia, God's multifarious wisdom is to be made manifest or made known, which means that all the created celestial beings, most notably the angels, are to see the riches of Christ displayed in the body of Christ. We are to display the riches of Christ for the entire universe to see. Another way to state this is that we are to be the manifestation of the riches of Christ.

Like Paul, all of us should be so humbled that through us, the least of all God's creatures, is God's grace in Christ Jesus displayed. Oh, the riches of Christ! This

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is all in accord with the purpose of the eons, which He makes in Christ Jesus, our Lord, *in Whom we have boldness and access with confidence, through His faith.*

The purpose of the eons, especially of the eons of the eons, is to display the riches of Christ, and a people have been chosen before the disruption of the world to display these riches to reveal the multifarious wisdom of God.

Perhaps some of this is too much to grasp with our limited minds, but through the faith of the Son of God, we can glory in Christ and approach our Father in heaven with boldness and confidence, not shrinking away out of fear. Through faith we can approach God because He has not only made us a part of the purpose of the eons *in* Christ, but He is using us to display His purpose through His Son.

Dear brethren, if God could choose one like Paul to reveal such glory, do you not think that He will eventually save all mankind? If God's grace could take the least of all men and entrust His most hidden secret to him, do you not think that He can and will save every creature that He has brought forth to His glory? If God could take us, that is, you and me, who are so unworthy, and, by His grace, use us to display His wisdom and the purpose of the eons in His Son to all His creatures throughout His universe, do you not think that even the vilest of sinners, one day, will be saved? This is what the riches of Christ are all about.

When he was writing his epistle to the Romans, Paul could hardly contain himself as he contemplated what God has done for mankind in Christ.

The riches, wisdom and knowledge of God.

For God locks up **all together** in stubbornness, that He should be merciful to all. O, the depth of **the riches and the wisdom and the knowledge of God!** How inscrutable are His judgments, and untraceable His ways! For, who knew the mind of the Lord? or, who became His adviser? or, who gives to Him first, and it will be repaid him? seeing that out of Him and through Him and for Him is all: to Him be the glory for the eons! Amen! (Romans 11.32-36 cv)

The depth of the riches and the wisdom and the knowledge of God speaks of the mercy of God shown to *all* His creation, none excepted. This little word *all* should be indelibly written on our heart. All are locked up in stubbornness so that *all* shall be saved, for God is the Savior of *all* mankind, especially of believers. Who can trace His ways? Who can take any credit for His ways? Not a single creature in the entire universe! It is all God's doing.

Where do we discover the depth of the wisdom and knowledge of God? We discover them in Christ, *in Whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are concealed* (Colossians 2.3 cv). Where do we discover the depth of the riches of God? We discover them in the riches of Christ. The Son of God could be likened to the bank, the banker and the treasurer of the entire universe. Of course, this

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does not refer to material wealth but to the very life of God in His Son, who is the wisdom and knowledge of God in Whom are all the riches of God.

Oh, let us not lust after the fleeting riches of the world! Let us passionately desire the riches of God in His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

How do we receive these riches? By the riches of His grace!

The riches of His grace.

Grace is one of the most powerful words in Scripture. Grace tells us that we can do nothing to receive the riches of Christ. We do not work for them; we do not earn them; we do not deserve them. We simply *receive* them *in* Christ. These riches are received by the riches of His grace. The emphasis of this phrase is on His grace, and the riches, simply quantify and qualify grace. After all, when we think of one with great riches we think of the quantity of their wealth and the fine quality of their possessions. In other words, the riches mean that His grace is abundant, even extravagant, or as Paul wrote, lavish, and His grace produces a result of the highest quality. Thus, the riches of His grace speak of how lavishly and freely God has bestowed favor on a people with the purpose of bringing them into the greatest destiny that has ever been or will be known in the history of mankind, and possibly the entire universe. This is in accord with the purpose of the eons.

We see most clearly the riches of His grace in Paul's epistle titled *Ephesians*.

For **in grace, through faith, are you saved**, and this is not out of you; it is God's approach present, not of works, lest anyone should be boasting.
(Ephesians 2.8-9 cv)

Our salvation is the starting point of grace. We are saved by grace through faith and even the faith is not ours but a gift of God. Our works do not, cannot and will not enter into salvation. The Son of God has done all the work to save us and to keep us saved forever. This is the mighty riches of grace that should cause us to boast only *in* Christ. We have no boast in our own works. The fact of the matter is that no one will ever be able to make his own boast in regard to salvation, and eventually all mankind will make their boast *in* Christ when He has accomplished His mission of heading up all in Himself.

Today, God's present approach to salvation is by grace. His approach will undoubtedly change for mankind that will face the great white throne judgment. Then it will be mercy of the highest order. The second death will be their way to salvation at the consummation of the eons. We are living in the day of grace, and by grace God is saving those that He has called and chosen. However, being saved by grace through faith is only the starting point of our understanding of the riches of His grace. In these riches, we discover the depth of our salvation, past, present

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and future. In the first fourteen verses of the Ephesians epistle, Paul began to unveil the depth of these riches.

Grace to you and peace from God, our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who blesses us with every spiritual blessing among the celestials, in Christ, according as He chooses us in Him before the disruption of the world, we to be holy and flawless in His sight, in love designating us beforehand for the place of a son for Him through Christ Jesus; in accord with the delight of His will, for the laud of the glory of His grace, which graces us in the Beloved: in Whom we are having the deliverance through His blood, the forgiveness of offenses in accord with the riches of His grace, which He lavishes on us; in all wisdom and prudence making known to us the secret of His will (in accord with His delight, which He purposed in Him) to have an administration of the complement of the eras, to head up all in the Christ—both that in the heavens and that on the earth—in Him in Whom our lot was cast also, being designated beforehand according to the purpose of the One Who is operating all in accord with the counsel of His will, that we should be for the laud of His glory, who are pre-expectant in the Christ. In Whom you also—on hearing the word of truth, the evangel of your salvation—in Whom on believing also, you are sealed with the holy spirit of promise (which is an earnest of the enjoyment of our allotment, to the deliverance of that which has been procured) for the laud of His glory! (Ephesians 1.2-14 cv)

Paul's writing can be difficult to follow since he uses such long sentences filled with so much meat that we have a hard time swallowing it. To make it a little easier to follow his thoughts and digest them, let us look at one thought at a time.

1. Who blesses us with every spiritual blessing among the celestials, in Christ.

Many people seek for blessings that have to do with the things of this world and the satisfying of fleshly needs. Their heart attitude is: "Bless me with this thing and that thing." But the blessings from the Father that are *in Christ* are both spiritual and among the celestials, which means they transcend the material world and even time and space. The celestial realm is a spiritual realm, for God is spirit. One day we will occupy spiritual bodies that will be able to live in the celestial realm, as well as in the earthly or physical realm. In that day, the things of this earth that were so important to our flesh will be so no more. Paul referred to these spiritual blessings as a present spiritual reality.

Because we are *in Christ today* and because He is seated among the celestials *today*, we can experience these spiritual blessings *in Christ today*. What are these blessings? They are the riches of Christ, which pertain to all that He has saved us into and all that He is and all that He will be to us for the eons and beyond. In other words, we taste these spiritual blessings as we taste and see that the Lord is

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good and as we look out to our glorious future *in* Christ. What follows are some of these blessings.

2. According as He chooses us in Him before the disruption of the world.

Paul referred to God's will in choosing a people *in* Christ. Many people believe in free will in regard to salvation, meaning that man must make the choice to believe or not to believe. Man is described as a free moral agent that makes all his own choices in life. But the facts do not support such a conclusion. Did any of us have a choice in becoming sinners? Because of Adam's sin, death passed through into all mankind, on which all sinned (Romans 5.12 cv). Where is the choice in this? There is none! So how can we declare that we are free moral agents when we are constituted this way as soon as we are conceived? So why do we presume that we have a free will that can trump the will of God? For example, Paul declared that our God wills that *all* mankind be saved and come into a realization of the truth (1 Timothy 2.4 cv). It is God's will, not man's will. Another example is Israel. God has caused a partial hardening to come upon Israel until the fullness of the nations has come in, and then He will save *all* Israel (Romans 11.25). Yet, another example is discovered in Paul's Roman epistle.

You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?" On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will it? **Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use?** What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? And He did so to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles. (Romans 9.19-24 NASB)

The key to understanding the will of God verses the will of man is that there are vessels of mercy that God prepared beforehand for glory. God is the One who prepares and calls according to His will, not our will.

According to Paul, if we are privileged to be among the ranks of the believers, then we are there because God chose us to be there, and He made this determination before the disruption of the world. In other words, we had no choice in the matter. By God's grace you have been chosen *in* Christ, and this was determined before mankind was ever formed from the soil of this earth. If you believe, this is something to greatly rejoice over and to glory *in* Christ. Our boast is *in* Christ and God's will, not in our self or our own will.

To some, this all might seem unfair to those who are not saved in this eon. Is it really unfair? Eventually, in God's mercy, all mankind will be saved. In God's

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wisdom, not all mankind will be saved in the same eon and some must wait until the consummation of the eons. Who is capable of questioning God's wisdom?

3. We to be holy and flawless in His sight.

Rejoice in the fact that you have been chosen *in* Christ and that it is God's full intention to see you through to His end that you will be holy and flawless in His sight. This is possible because we will be conformed to the image of Christ, and the Father will see His Son in us when He looks upon us. We will be like Him because we will be transfigured and conformed to Him and the glory of His body. No one can stand before God without being consumed unless he is like the Son of God. God could have just saved us and left us to our own devices to become like His Son or to figure out how to become holy in His sight, but we would have failed miserably. Consequently, in choosing and saving us, the Father has declared that we *will be* holy and flawless by His grace. This speaks of the highest quality of character produced by grace. Oh, the riches of His grace!

4. In love designating us beforehand for the place of a son for Him through Christ Jesus.

Out of His love, God desires to have sons, not just children. He needs sons to fulfill His purpose and to express His love. God is after sons that are like the Son of His love, and He has designated beforehand, before the disruption of the world, those who will be placed as sons in His kingdom. *Sonship* refers to *reigning*. In other words, God has chosen beforehand those who will reign in His kingdom. But notice that sonship comes *through* Christ Jesus. We become sons through the riches of His grace *in* Christ. Reigning in a kingdom of righteousness requires righteous character, and grace produces this in the sons of God. It is the very righteousness of Christ.

5. In accord with the delight of His will, for the laud of the glory of His grace, which graces us in the Beloved.

This is all in accord with the delight of the will of God. It is God's delight to do this for His Son and for us. The Father did not purpose this grudgingly, as if He was forced or as if He had no choice in the matter. No; He delights in doing this. It is for the laud or praise of the glory of His grace, and this grace is graced to us in His Son.

We see the glory of His grace in Paul's testimony of being blinded by Christ. Paul had no choice in the matter. It was the will of God, even the delight of His will, to take the least of the saints and put him into service. It is to the laud of the glory of His grace, which graced Paul in the Beloved. The word *glory* can refer to something highly esteemed or favorable. Thus, the glory of His grace speaks of the quality of His grace. The highly esteemed and favorable grace of God has graced us or has been given to us as a gift in the Beloved. Because of Christ alone, we receive the riches of His grace.

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6. In Whom we are having the deliverance through His blood, the forgiveness of offenses in accord with the riches of His grace, which He lavishes on us.

Because of the blood of Christ, the riches of His grace are lavished upon us. The word *lavish* refers to something extravagant or more than enough. Because of the blood, grace is extravagantly available to us. There is so much grace that it is lavish grace; it is inexhaustible grace. Thus, the quantity and quality of grace is inexhaustible and beyond comparison. No matter the situation, the failure, even the sin, grace is lavishly available to deliver us safely into His celestial kingdom. When we see reference to forgiveness of offenses, it generally refers to entrance into the kingdom. However, our salvation is far greater than this, for lavish grace also justifies, just as if we had never sinned.

7. In all wisdom and prudence making known to us the secret of His will (in accord with His delight, which He purposed in Him) to have an administration of the complement of the eras, to head up all in the Christ—both that in the heavens and that on the earth.

The riches of His grace bring us into the very secret of God's will that is purposed *in* His Son. It is by this lavish grace that the eyes of our heart are enlightened to see what few men today see and what the prophets of old saw dimly. It is God's delight to reveal His purpose and plan that had been concealed from all the previous generations and eons. The plan (administration) that God will fully accomplish in the fullness of the times is to head up all in the Christ, that in the heavens and on the earth. This is the purpose of the eons. By the riches of His grace, your eyes have been opened to the secret of God's will. It is time to rejoice in the Lord!

8. In Him in Whom our lot was cast also, being designated beforehand according to the purpose of the One Who is operating all in accord with the counsel of His will, that we should be for the laud of His glory.

Paul brought believers into the very purpose of God *in* Christ. By grace, our lot has been cast with Christ, which means that whatever He does to fulfill God's purpose we have been made a part of as well. He is to head up all, and we have been joined with Him in the heading up of all. We have no choice in the matter. Praise God! Our lot was cast beforehand, before the disruption of the world. This is all in accord with the purpose of God, the One who operates all in accord with the counsel of His will. It is God's will that our lot has been cast with Christ. No wonder it is to the laud of His glory! Our lot speaks of the riches of His grace.

9. Who are pre-expectant in the Christ.

Paul included this strange statement about being *pre-expectant* in the Christ. This refers to having an expectation that Christ is coming for us before the wrath

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of God is poured out on this world in judgment before the King of kings literally steps foot on this earth. Believers in this eon are not destined for wrath (Romans 8.1; 1 Thessalonians 1.10). We are expecting to rise in the air before the final indignation that ends this present wicked eon; to be delivered into the presence of the Lord. This is confirmed in the next verse.

10. You are sealed with the holy spirit of promise (which is an earnest of the enjoyment of our allotment, to the deliverance of that which has been procured) for the laud of His glory!

As if being *in Christ* were not enough, we are told through Paul that we are sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. This is the seal of God, God's promise to us. According to Paul, we know that we have been given the Holy Spirit (Romans 5.5; 1 Thessalonians 4.8; 2 Timothy 1.14). But being sealed is an assurance from the Father that nothing can or will change our being *in Christ* and coming into all the riches of His grace. Later in his letter, Paul wrote: *And do not be causing sorrow to the holy spirit of God by which you are sealed for the day of deliverance* (Ephesians 4.30 cv). The sealing is our assurance that we will be delivered *into* the enjoyment of our allotment in the celestial kingdom when we take on spiritual bodies in the image of the Celestial or Heavenly One. The Holy Spirit of promise has sealed us *in Christ* as a pledge or earnest that one day we will receive an allotment or inheritance in the kingdom of God, and this promise is for the praise of His glory and for our enjoyment. Do you see how marvelous are the riches of His grace? Who of us deserves such a glorious destiny?

As we continue in the Ephesians letter, we see that Paul unveiled so many riches that it is almost too much to take in. This is why Paul had to stop and mention his prayer for the recipients of his letter. He prayed that *the Father of glory, may be giving you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the realization of Him, the eyes of your heart having been enlightened, for you to perceive what is the expectation of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of the enjoyment of His allotment among the saints, and what the transcendent greatness of His power for us who are believing, in accord with the operation of the might of His strength, which is operative in the Christ, rousing Him from among the dead and seating Him at His right hand among the celestials, up over every sovereignty and authority and power and lordship, and every name that is named, not only in this eon, but also in that which is impending: and subjects all under His feet, and gives Him, as Head over all, to the ecclesia which is His body, the complement of the One completing the all in all* (Ephesians 1.17-23 cv).

This is another long sentence, filled with the riches of His grace. Paul prayed that the saints would perceive the expectation or the hope of His calling. This refers to our destiny in Christ. It is God's calling of us unto glory, the glory of His Son. The saints are to know the greatness of the power of God, the very same power that was operative in Christ when He was roused from among the dead. Today, He is seated at the right hand of His Father among the celestials. He is over all levels of rulership in God's universe and has a name that cannot and will not be matched

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in this eon or the eons to come. The Father has subjected all under His feet and has made Him Head of the universe.

11. And gives Him, as Head over all, to the ecclesia which is His body, the complement of the One completing the all in all.

It is in this grand view of Christ that Paul brought the ecclesia, which is the body of Christ, under the Head of the universe and declared that this body is the complement of the Head who will head up all until He is all in all. Is it any wonder that Paul had to pray that they would perceive the glory of this secret that was revealed to him for the nations? Do you realize that as a believer you are a member of Christ's body and that all the members of His body are His complement and will be displayed as such throughout the universe and among the celestials for the eons to come? Do you realize that the body of Christ is the fullness of Christ or the exact image of the Head of all? The body also is destined to become His complement for the eons by being roused from among the dead by the same transcendent greatness of His power that roused Christ and seated Him among the celestials! This is the riches of His grace. Who of us deserves such glory? It is all by the lavish grace of God.

We can only imagine that as he was dictating this letter, Paul's thoughts were racing a mile a minute as he contemplated the riches that he sought to convey in words.

And you, being dead to your offenses and sins, **in which once you walked, in accord with the eon of this world, in accord with the chief of the jurisdiction of the air**, the spirit now operating in the sons of stubbornness (among whom we also all behaved ourselves once in the lusts of our flesh, doing the will of the flesh and of the comprehension, and were, in our nature, children of indignation, even as the rest), **yet God**, being rich in mercy, because of His vast love with which He loves us (we also being dead to the offenses and the lusts), vivifies us together in Christ (in grace are you saved!) and rouses us together and seats us together among the celestials, in Christ Jesus, that, in the oncoming eons, He should be displaying the transcendent riches of His grace in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2.1-7 cv)

Before we were placed *in* Christ, we were walking in accord with the eon of this world. We live in the eon that Paul described as the present wicked eon. We were once part of this world system as sons of stubbornness, worthy only of indignation. Oh, but thank God for His vast love with which He loves us, even when we were dead in our offenses and lusts. It was while we were in this dire condition that God's love for us was most clearly manifested. His love is a vast love; it is like the deepest of oceans and the highest of mountains.

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12. His vast love vivifies us together in Christ (in grace are you saved!) and rouses us together and seats us together among the celestials, in Christ Jesus.

It is God's love for us that gives us life *in* His Son. To remind us of the riches of His grace, Paul declared that in grace you are saved. Not only have we been given life, but in God's view, we have already been raised up together and seated together among the celestials in Christ Jesus. Today, in spirit, we are seated among the celestials; spiritually speaking, we have arrived at our destiny, and now we wait for our Rescuer to come from heaven and transport us there to be among the celestials, not only in spirit, but also conformed to the body of His glory. In His vast love, we are to be seated with the Head of the universe, just as the Son of God is now seated with the God and Father of the universe. Can you imagine a destiny more glorious than this one? Marvelous grace!

13. That, in the oncoming eons, He should be displaying the transcendent riches of His grace in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

Paul was so struck by His grace that the word *riches* was not enough; he had to add the word *transcendent*, which means "surpass or exceed, as something extraordinary," to quantify the riches further. Paul pointed to the oncoming eons, the eons of the eons, or the Lord's day, in which God will be displaying the surpassing, the excellent and the extraordinary riches of His grace to us *in* His Son, Christ Jesus, our Lord. The riches of His grace transcend all the riches imaginable.

We do not know the full depths of these extraordinary riches. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND WHICH HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN, ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM" (1 Corinthians 2.9 NASB). By the spirit of God, we taste these riches today, but a day is coming when we will be so bathed in them that we will be the display of these transcendent riches, in His Son, throughout the entire universe to the glory of God. Oh, the kindness of God!

14. For His achievement are we, being created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God makes ready beforehand, that we should be walking in them. (Ephesians 2.10 cv)

By the riches of His grace, we are His achievement or, as other translations state, we are His workmanship *in* Christ Jesus. Note the present tense that not only are we His achievement, but we are being created *in* Christ Jesus for a very special purpose, for good works that God made ready for us beforehand. Paul declared that all these riches were established before the disruption of the world, just so that we could walk in them. We do not have to search for good works; we just have to be led by the spirit of God and walk in them. Although there are good

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works for us in this life, given Paul's vision of our destiny, it is just as likely that these good works are the works that we will be walking in during the oncoming eons to the laud of His glory.

I trust these fourteen points will whet your appetite to search out the transcendent riches of His grace in Christ Jesus. There are many other aspects of these riches, such as being a one new humanity; fellow citizens of the saints; God's dwelling place, in spirit; and joint enjoyers of an allotment, a joint body and joint partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus (see Ephesians 2.15-16, 19-22; 3.6). You are encouraged to search Paul's epistles and mine for these riches. May the eyes of your heart be enlightened to see more clearly!

The riches of His glory.

Now, let us look at the other aspect of the riches of Christ, and that is the riches of His glory. As with grace, this speaks of the quantity and quality of glory. Also, grace and glory are almost inseparable. We could say that grace leads to glory, or grace is the pathway to glory.

God moves upon the lives of His people with the purpose of bringing them into the riches of His glory in the oncoming eons. Through the riches of His grace in Christ poured out on His people, God is preparing them for the coming riches of His glory in Christ.

Now, if God, wanting to display His indignation and to make His powerful doings known, carries, with much patience, the vessels of indignation, adapted for destruction, it is that **He should also be making known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy**, which He makes ready before for glory—us, whom He calls also, not only out of the Jews, but out of the nations also. (Romans 9.22-24 cv)

In His mercy, God has called unto Himself a people who deserve His indignation or wrath. Instead of receiving wrath, they are called to enter into glory that He prepared them for beforehand. What mercy! To these vessels of mercy, a people to come out from among the Jews and the nations to come into glory in the oncoming eons, He makes known the riches of His glory that He has prepared for them. God calls from glory unto glory. He wants us to know that in His mercy, He has called us into the glory of Christ.

In the Philippians letter, Paul revealed that the riches in glory *in* Christ Jesus meet us in our everyday life and the needs of life. Glory has a very practical application to us while we live on earth. This was Paul's prayer for the saints in this regard. Notice how Paul took the practical and pointed to the future glory for the eons of the eons.

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Now my God shall be filling your every need **in accord with His riches in glory in Christ Jesus**. Now to our God and Father be glory for the eons of the eons! Amen! (Philippians 4.19-20 cv)

Dear brethren, when He fills our every need, God is doing so in accord with the destiny that is ours in Christ. He moves upon our lives with the riches of His glory in view. We see this same thought every place that Paul used the expression *the riches of His glory*.

On this behalf am I bowing my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, after Whom every kindred in the heavens and on earth is being named, that He may be giving you, in accord with the riches of His glory, to be made staunch with power, through His spirit, in the man within, **Christ to dwell in your hearts through faith**, that you, having been rooted and grounded in love, should be strong to grasp, together with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and depth and height—**to know the love of Christ as well which transcends knowledge**—that you may be completed for the entire complement of God. (Ephesians 3.14-19 cv)

Christ is to dwell richly in our hearts for the purpose of us being so rooted and grounded in His love that together with all the saints we will know the full measure of the love of Christ. This love transcends knowledge. We can talk about love and intellectualize love all we want, but it will be of no value to us unless we are growing up in Christ in love. We are to be a complete or mature man in Christ so that we can truly be the complement of the One completing the all in all. This is in accord with the riches of His glory, which means that the very purpose of love is to bring us into the glory of God in Christ. It is the love of Christ that will complete us to be His complement, and this is in accord with the riches of His glory. Consequently, love leads to glory, into the riches of His glory.

The riches of the glory of the enjoyment of His allotment.

Therefore, I also, on hearing of this faith of yours in the Lord Jesus, and that for all the saints, do not cease giving thanks for you, making mention in my prayers that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may be **giving you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the realization of Him, the eyes of your heart having been enlightened, for you to perceive.... what the riches of the glory of the enjoyment of His allotment among the saints....** (Ephesians 1.15-18 cv)

Paul prayed for the saints that the secret that he was given to dispense to the nations would be realized. This was, and still is, a formidable task that is only possible by the spirit of God. Nevertheless, Paul prayed that the eyes of their heart would see the riches of God's glory in the coming eons.

Glory can refer to happiness. When God is happy, glory bursts forth. Notice that the allotment (or inheritance) is His allotment. It is the enjoyment of His

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allotment among the saints. This must refer to the inheritance that Christ will receive. *Ask of Me, and I will give the nations as Your allotment, and as Your holding, the limits of the earth* (Psalm 2.8 cv). Surely, in that day, the Son will enter into the joy of His heart, the joy that was set before Him as He was led to the cross. This is in accord with the riches of His glory.

The glorious riches of this secret.

Finally, we conclude with another word from Paul that sums up the secret of His evangel for the nations.

I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for you, and am filling up in my flesh, in His stead, the deficiencies of the afflictions of Christ, for His body, which is the ecclesia of which I became a dispenser, in accord with the administration of God, which is granted to me for you, to complete the word of God—**the secret which has been concealed from the eons and from the generations**, yet now was made manifest to His saints, to whom God wills to make known what are the glorious riches of this secret among the nations, which is: **Christ among you, the expectation of glory**—Whom we are announcing, admonishing every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we should be **presenting every man mature in Christ Jesus**; for which I am toiling also, struggling in accord with His operation, which is operating in me with power. (Colossians 1.24-29 cv)

The secret was concealed from the eons and the generations, yet, praise God, it is now manifested to the saints. God has willed to make known what are the glorious riches of this secret among the nations. The secret is Christ among the nations, the expectation of glory. By His spirit, Christ walks among us now to lead us into His eonian glory.

This is why Paul admonished all and taught all the wisdom of God. He saw the destiny for those who love God. He struggled and toiled for every man, not only for the ecclesia but for every man, that all should be presented mature *in* Christ Jesus.

This is my prayer for all who are reading this material. It is not about facts and figures. It is about us seeing the purpose of the eons in such a way that it leads us to become mature *in* Christ and not to be led astray by the many deceptions of our wicked day. As we see God's purpose *in* Christ, it is to bring about change in our lives leading us toward the perfection that is a mature man *in* Christ as we press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

By the riches of His grace, glory will come. This is the promise of Christ. May Christ dwell richly in your heart and may you pursue Christ and all His riches!

We pray that soon we will enter into all the riches of His glory among the celestials.

3. THE WORD OF THE CROSS

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that **Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures**, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. (1 Corinthians 15.3-5 NASB)

The death of our Lord Jesus on the cross of Calvary is the foundation of the faith of all who believe in this day, and these few words, penned by Paul, the apostle of the nations, sum up the evangel by which one is saved. One commentator has stated that there are seven glorious accomplishments of the cross: repudiation of sin (Hebrews 9.26), inactivation of death (2 Timothy 1.10), inactivation of Satan (Hebrews 2.14), justification of mankind (Romans 5.18), subjection of enemies (1 Corinthians 15.25), reconciliation of all (Colossians 1.20), and vivification of all (1 Corinthians 15.22). ¹ I would add one more, and that is glorification (Romans 8.30).

These are the accomplishments of the death of the Son of God on a cross that will ultimately extend to all mankind and all God's creation. The first to come into the **full** joy of these accomplishments in the next eon is the body of Christ.

This is the glory of the cross that has been, and yet will be, one hundred percent successful in undoing all that was wrought by the one transgression of the first Adam. In the last Adam, shall *all* be made alive (vivified). We could say that the riches of Christ are discovered in the cross of Christ.

Now, in his first epistle to the Corinthians, Paul used a phrase that is not used in any other place in Scripture, and he used it not only in reference to the past finished work of the cross but also as a present work for all who believe.

For **the word of the cross** to those indeed perishing is foolishness, and to us—those **being saved**—it is the power of God.... (1 Corinthians 1.18 YLT)

The word of the cross is the power of God. To understand what Paul meant by this phrase, it is best to start at the beginning of his epistle to see the issue that he was trying to address with the believers in Corinth. In other words, let us understand *the word of the cross* in the context of Paul's epistle.

¹ *The Word of the Cross*, Arthur C. Lamb, Concordant Publishing Concern.

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Hallowed in Christ Jesus, called saints.

Paul, a called apostle of Christ Jesus, through the will of God, began by declaring the position that the ecclesia of God in Corinth had in Christ Jesus.

To the ecclesia of God which is in Corinth, **hallowed in Christ Jesus, called saints**, together with all in every place who are invoking the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ, both theirs and ours.... (1 Corinthians 1.2 cv)

Some translations use the word *sanctified* in the place of *hallowed*, which means “to make holy” (*holyize*). Either way, Paul reminded them that they were set apart for or consecrated to God. No matter where they were in their spiritual walk in Christ, they belonged to God, along with all the other believers in every place that named the name of the Lord Jesus. We could say that this is an objective truth for all who believe and all who call on the name of the Lord. It is not dependent on the details of our theology or whether we have differences with one another; it is dependent on Christ, in whom we have been sanctified or hallowed. Christ is our sanctification. This is something that we need to be mindful of in any dealings with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Grace and peace.

Then, Paul proceeded by blessing the brethren with grace and peace from God, our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. This beloved apostle had some stern and corrective words for the ones he loved, and they would need the grace of God to receive his word and the peace of God to remain in fellowship with their apostle, who died daily for them (1 Corinthians 15.31). This should be another reminder to all who serve the Lord’s people.

Thank my God concerning you.

Next, Paul commended the brethren. It is so much like our old humanity to tear down others rather than build them up. However, Paul, as our example, revealed the way of the spirit of God in dealing with the ecclesias, even when there are deficiencies in their service and understanding. The order is first to commend our brethren by encouraging them in the good that they have done or that they have in Christ, and then, in love, to correct them. Paul’s goal was always to build up and not to tear down (2 Corinthians 10.8; 13.10).

I am thanking my God always concerning you over **the grace of God which is being given you in Christ Jesus**, for in everything are you enriched in him, in all expression and all knowledge, according as the testimony of Christ was confirmed among you, so that you are not deficient in any grace, awaiting the unveiling of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who will be confirming you also until the consummation, unimpeachable in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is God, through Whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. (1 Corinthians 1.4-9 cv)

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What faith in a great God is expressed through this beloved man! Regardless of the challenges that he faced with the Corinthians, he saw through all that to the God who is faithful. He thanked his God for the grace given to them in Christ Jesus that was enriching them in Christ to the point that they were not deficient in any grace or spiritual gifts as they were looking forward to the day in which Christ is unveiled. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself will confirm them to the consummation or the end, making them unimpeachable or blameless in His day when He appears to all His people. Until then, God is faithful, and He called the Corinthians into the fellowship of His Son.

Oh, that we would look at our brethren in Christ and commend them in such a glorious way!

I am entreating you—Christ is parted!

Now I am entreating you, brethren, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all may be saying the same thing, and **there may be no schisms among you**, but you may be attuned to the same mind and to the same opinion. (1 Corinthians 1.10 cv)

In spite of the good that he saw in this ecclesia, Paul, nevertheless, also saw something that was a great danger to them. There were schisms or strifes among those who are called saints. They were dividing into camps based on men. Some said they were of Paul, some of Apollos, some of Cephas and yet some of Christ. For this, Paul indicted them: "*Christ is parted!*" They had divided into camps, which to Paul was like parting or dividing Christ. Paul retorted to the Corinthians: *Not Paul was crucified for your sakes!* See 1 Corinthians 1.12-13. They had taken their eyes off Christ who was crucified for their sakes. There was only one ground upon which they were joined together, and that was Christ and Him crucified. Any other ground was schism, for it parted Christ.

Evidently, one of the issues that led to the schism or division among the saints was who baptized whom. The saints were claiming that they were baptized in the name of the brother who performed the baptism. Paul refused to allow anyone to claim that they were baptized into the name of Paul. Why? Because they were baptized into Christ alone! In fact, in his later epistle to the Colossians, Paul declared that we are complete in Christ, in whom we were circumcised also with a circumcision not made by hands, in the stripping off of the body of flesh in the circumcision of Christ; and were entombed together with Him in baptism, in whom we were roused together also through faith in the operation of God, who rouses Him from among the dead (see Colossians 2.10-12). In other words, Christ's circumcision and baptism became our circumcision and baptism, just as we are identified with His death, burial, and resurrection. Consequently, Paul removed all the emphasis on the physical requirements, including water baptism, and placed the emphasis on Christ and Him crucified.

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Today, there are so many emphases throughout Christendom; countless divisions based on the teaching of men and their ministries, their names, their titles, their books, and the list goes on and on. One group of believers emphasizes one thing and refuses to have anything to do with others who emphasize something else, and vice versa. Many even continue to debate and divide over the whole matter of baptism. If he were on this earth today, surely Paul would declare: *Christ is parted!* We have divided Christ in so many ways that, outwardly, the body of Christ seems to be a disjointed body with parts scattered all about.

Paul would have none of this sectarianism, for according to his evangel there is only one ground upon which the ecclesia is to stand and be united, and that is the cross of Christ.

For Christ does not commission me to be baptizing, but to be bringing the evangel, not in wisdom of word, lest **the cross of Christ** may be made void. (1 Corinthians 1.17 cv)

The cross of Christ is the foundation of Paul's evangel. Truly, there are many great truths and even secrets (mysteries) revealed in Paul's evangel, but at the heart of it all is the cross, not the wisdom of words (cleverness of speech). In this verse, Paul wiped aside everything that divides and conquers the heart of man and even the Lord's people and focused straightaway on the heart of the matter. Man uses words liberally, as if in his words are great truths and wisdom, and presents them in clever ways to persuade others for his own glory. To hear people claim that they were baptized into a man's name is a great boast in the one doing the baptizing. Oh, the pride of man!

We could say that men can produce their own evangel with the cleverness of their speech, but Paul stood against such a thing lest it void the cross of Christ, that is, make the cross into something less than what it truly is. Paul severed all that would make void the meaning and value of the cross, causing it to lose its effectiveness. Standing against *the wisdom of word*, Paul introduced for the first time the phrase *the word of the cross*. In doing so, he contrasted two groups; one is perishing and the other is being saved by the power of God.

For **the word of the cross** is stupidity, indeed, to those who are perishing, yet to us who are being saved it is the power of God. (1 Corinthians 1.18 cv)

The word of the cross refers not only to the finished work of the cross that will ultimately reach all mankind; but also, it refers to the practical action or outworking of the cross in the life of those who believe. The finished work of the cross refers to that which was accomplished on the cross and will never be repeated. The word of the cross includes this but also goes beyond it to refer to that which is ongoing and which will be operative until the consummation of the eons. We could say that the word of the cross speaks of the action to bring about the purpose of the eons, for the word of the cross speaks of the active power of God to save believers.

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Perishing and *being saved* refer to a present action and not a past act that is finished. There is no practical effect of the cross on those in unbelief. The cross is stupidity to them and consequently they *are perishing*.² However, for those who believe, the cross has the opposite effect. The word of the cross is a daily active force in their lives. They are *being saved* by the power of God.

The cross severs.

What is the word of the cross? Or, we could ask: What is the message of the cross? In its simplicity, it means that the cross severs all that is of the old humanity until one is brought into all that is new. This is what Christ accomplished on Calvary, but it is more than a message about an historical event; it is a message about a very practical and operative force in the life of the one who believes. It is the power of God to sever and set apart a people for Himself.

It is most appropriate that Paul was the one to reveal the word of the cross, for his whole life is a testimony of the severing of God, even beginning at his birth.

Now, when it delights God, Who **severs me** from my mother's womb and calls me through His grace, to unveil His Son in me that I may be evangelizing Him among the nations.... (Galatians 1.15-16 cv)

Some translations use the phrase *set apart*, which means that the calling on Paul's life was set by God even before he came into this world through his mother's womb. He served God as a Hebrew of Hebrews and a Pharisee and was so zealous for the traditions of his fathers that he became the enemy of God in trying to destroy His people. But this all changed on the road to Damascus when he met the risen and glorified Christ seated in heaven at His Father's right hand. On that infamous day, Paul was severed from all that he had been defending and upholding. Paul was severed from holding one of the highest ranks in Judaism to become one of the lowest as a slave of Christ in God's kingdom.

Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus, a called apostle, **severed** for the evangel of God. (Romans 1.1 cv)

He was severed from all that he once held so that he could take the evangel of God to the nations, which began in some measure when he was severed for the work.

Now, at their ministering to the Lord and fasting, the holy spirit said, "**Sever**, by all means, to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." (Acts 13.2 cv)

² *Perishing* is not for eternal destruction or torment. It is entering into death, either the first death (of the body) or the second death (of works) for the eons of the eons, thus missing out on the glory of those eons or ages.

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The Holy Spirit severed Barnabas and Saul (Paul) for a special work to which they were called. This represented something new. The twelve apostles had failed to reach the heart of the entire nation of Israel. Their message had been rejected by the majority, which meant there would be no national repentance in that day, and consequently, the kingdom they longed for would not come in that day. It was at this point that Paul began to take the evangel to the scattered Jews and some proselytes, until finally he took his evangel to the nations in obedience to the charge given him by the Lord.

In reading Acts, it is important to keep in mind that it is the history of a *transitional* time that started with Pentecost. We should not view the record of Acts as only the beginning of our present era of the body of Christ. Rather, it also should be viewed as the end of an era that involved the Jews according to the flesh. Israel was in apostasy and Acts reveals that because of this and their lack of repentance, *the kingdom of the heavens* that the prophets spoke of and that they long sought would not come in that day, and it remains so to this day.

Consider how Acts ends.

And some believed the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved. And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Spirit through Isaiah the prophet unto your fathers, saying, Go thou unto this people, and say, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall in no wise understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall in no wise perceive: for this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest, haply they should perceive with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should turn again, and I should heal them. **Be it known therefore unto you, that this salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles: they will also hear.** (Acts 28.24-28 ASV)

We could say that it was at this point that Paul turned from his fellow Jews and took his evangel to the nations or gentiles. However, we must not think that Paul never tried to reach a Jew again, for it seems that his longing for them never left his heart. Actually, historical records seem to indicate that Paul traveled to Britain near the end of his life, discovered some of the lost tribes of Israel, and shared the good news of Christ with them.

Finally, in reference to Paul being severed, there is one more proof as recorded in his epistles.

Whoever are wanting to put on a fair face in the flesh, these are compelling you to circumcise only that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ Jesus. For not even they who are circumcising are maintaining law, but they want you to be circumcised that they should be boasting in that flesh of yours. Now may it not be mine to be boasting, except in **the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ**, through which the world has been **crucified**

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to me, and I to the world. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything, but a new creation. (Galatians 6.12-15 cv)

Circumcision was a hot topic among even the believing Jews; after all, they were given the seal of circumcision through their father Abraham. But what did this seal mean? Circumcision is the cutting away of the flesh. It is a severing from the flesh. Of course, the Israelites missed the significance of this act and saw it purely as a physical act that placed them in a position beyond the nations. It was the boast of the Israelites, a boast in the flesh. However, Paul proclaimed that neither circumcision nor uncircumcision was of any value. Why? All boast in the flesh was severed at the cross.

Paul saw himself crucified to the world and the world to him. He was severed from the world and its boast in the flesh, and the world was severed to him who had no boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Consequently, Paul is our example of one who is severed for Christ, and it is in this context that we can and must understand Paul's use of the phrase *the word of the cross*.

The word of the cross severs all of the old humanity or, we could say, the old creation. However, there is one more aspect of this word that we must understand in light of Paul's evangel, and that is, it removes all the boast of the heart of the old humanity that is filled with pride.

No boasting in the flesh.

What were the Corinthians doing when they claimed that they were baptized in the name of this man and in the name of that man? They were boasting not only in the name of the man who baptized them but also in the fact that they were baptized. It is as if they were saying: "Look at me; I was baptized *and* Apollos, that great man of God, baptized me." It was the very same thing of which the circumcision was boasting. "Look at me; I am of the circumcision. We have the seal given to us by God through our father Abraham. This makes us special."

They were all boasting in the flesh, something that Paul detected like a hound dog on a fox hunt that smells the scent of the fox. To Paul, it was the foul odor of the flesh trying to exalt itself and take credit for what it did. Nothing of the sort was allowed to enter the evangel with which Paul was entrusted to discharge to the nations. The word of the cross severs the flesh from boasting of any kind.

So that **no flesh** at all should be boasting in God's sight. (1 Corinthians 1.29 cv)

The word of the cross removes all boasting in the flesh and places all boasting in the Lord.

He who is boasting, **in the Lord** let him be boasting. (1 Corinthians 1.31 cv)

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Anytime we start to boast in anything or anyone other than the Lord Jesus Christ, we are boasting in the flesh, and we are parting or dividing Christ. This is a real danger in the ecclesias of our day. Some boast in their pulpit (the message coming forth) and pastor to the point that it is what could be called “pulpit worship” or “pastor worship,” which amounts to idolatry.

As we have seen, in his opening salutation to the Corinthians, Paul greeted *the ecclesia of God, hallowed in Christ Jesus, called saints, together with all in every place who are invoking the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ* (1 Corinthians 1.2 cv). In spite of all their sectarianism and other faults, Paul declared them to be saints, which means holy or one who is consecrated or set apart for God. Being set apart for God severs one from the world and the flesh. Obviously, the Corinthians had not learned this lesson. They were immature and Paul could not feed them solid spiritual food.

And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual, but as **to fleshy**, as to minors in Christ. Milk I give you to drink, not solid food, for not as yet were you able. Nay, still, not even now are you able, for **you are still fleshy**. For where there is jealousy and strife among you, **are you not fleshy** and walking according to man? For whenever anyone may be saying, “I, indeed, am of Paul,” yet another, “I, of Apollos,” **will he not be fleshy?** (1 Corinthians 3.1-4 cv)

When the flesh boasts, it divides brethren from one another. When the flesh is severed, there is no boast, and there is unity with one another. We can be assured that when the cross has not worked in a life to sever the flesh, there will be boasting and there will be parting or division. By contrast, we can also be assured that where the word of the cross is active, there is no boasting or parting.

Now, let us return to the text of Corinthians and fill in some detail.

The perishing.

For **the word of the cross** is stupidity, indeed, to those who are **perishing**, yet to us who are **being saved** it is the power of God. (1 Corinthians 1.18 cv)

Paul applied the word of the cross to two groups of people; one is *perishing* and the other is *being saved*. Again, note that it is a present action, not a past act. To one group, it is stupidity; and to the other group, it is the power of God. What a contrast!

Obviously, the perishing are those who reject the message of the cross. Why do they do such a thing? To them, it is stupid to believe in Christ crucified, for they see no wisdom in a man dying for them to save them. To them, how can life come from death? It is even greater stupidity to them to know that the cross would

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sever them from their old humanity, which they adore. This is folly to them but to God their wisdom is stupidity.

For it is written, I shall be destroying the wisdom of the wise, and the understanding of the intelligent shall I be repudiating. Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the discussor of this eon? **Does not God make stupid the wisdom of this world?** (1 Corinthians 1.19-20 cv)

The world, which represents the world (*kosmos*) system in which mankind operates, has a wisdom of its own, apart from the wisdom of God; however, this wisdom never leads to knowing God. In fact, it yields the opposite result.

For since, in fact, in the wisdom of God, **the world through wisdom knew not God**, God delights, through the stupidity of the heralding, to save those who are believing, since, in fact, Jews signs are requesting, and Greeks wisdom are seeking, yet we are heralding Christ crucified, to Jews, indeed, a snare, yet to the nations stupidity.... (1 Corinthians 1.21-23 cv)

It is as if God turns the whole matter right on the head of mankind and delights in heralding what they call stupidity and saving those who are the least accepted by the world, even what we would call the “down and out.”

The Jews viewed the word of the cross as stupidity, for they were requesting signs rather than cutting off their love of the flesh. Why were signs important to them? First, we need to be reminded that the outward sign of the flesh was the boast of the Jew. Second, their fathers were miraculously delivered out of Egypt, and they were expecting the same thing in their day. They requested a sign as proof that God was delivering them. However, signs never kept the Israelites from apostasy, and would not keep them from it in Paul’s day, nor will they in the closing days of our era. To tell a Jew that the only sign they would receive was the sign of Jonah, that is, the death of their Messiah at their own hands, was untenable. Death to bring them life or being severed from their ancestral ties that were given to them by the Lord to enter the kingdom was stupid, pure folly to their religious minds. It was more than stupidity to them; it was a snare. They tripped over the very thing that would have delivered them in that day.

The Greeks were another class of people in Paul’s day. They were not representative of all the nations. We could say they were the intellectuals of the day that took pride in their philosophy, which was their boast. They put great trust in their mental capacity to explain the universe and mankind. They had wisdom on all the great matters of life, and the word of the cross was stupidity to their intellectual minds.

According to Webster’s dictionary, *philosophy* is “the processes governing thought and conduct; theory or investigation of the principles or laws that regulate the universe and underlie all knowledge and reality.” This is the thinking and wisdom of man and not the wisdom of God. Christ is not philosophy, and the

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cross does not present merely another view of death and life. It is the very explanation of all the wisdom of God.

Paul continued by contrasting man's wisdom with God's wisdom.

Yet to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, **Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God**, for the stupidity of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. (1 Corinthians 1.24-25 cv)

For you are observing your calling, brethren, that **there are not many wise according to the flesh**; not many powerful, not many noble, but the stupidity of the world God chooses, that He may be disgracing the wise, and the weakness of the world God chooses, that He may be disgracing the strong, and the ignoble and the contemptible things of the world God chooses, and that which is not, that He may be discarding that which is.... (1 Corinthians 1.26-28 cv)

Man's thinking and strength cannot even approach the lowest level of God's thinking and strength, if there is even such a thing. In His wisdom, God has not taken the high and lofty of society to prove His wisdom and power. He has taken the least from among mankind so that He can prove the utter folly of man and his ways. This is the wisdom and power of God.

Man is always seeking to justify himself, to defend himself, to commend himself, to exalt himself, to glorify himself. Look around; listen to or read the daily news reports. It does not take very long to see that this is the heart of man, and this is exactly what the word of the cross exposes.

How will **the "good" of the world** respond when told that in the sight of God there are none good; all are sinners and their goodness will not save them? Most people think that they are good since they have not done anything really bad. After all, they will say: "I haven't killed anyone or robbed a bank." Their boast is in their goodness. To these self-proclaimed good people, the word of the cross is foolishness.

How will **the "comfortable" of the world** respond when told that a comfortable life apart from God will not save them? After all, they have all the money they need, good health and can do whatever they want. The world would say, "They have it made." They have no needs, most of all the need of a Savior. Their boast is in their riches. To these "I am rich and in need of nothing" people, the word of the cross is foolishness.

How will **the "philosopher" of the world**, a lover of man's wisdom and knowledge, respond when told that his wisdom is foolishness, mere child's play, and it will not save him, for God's wisdom is in His Son who died on a cross? Their boast is in their wisdom and knowledge. To the philosopher, the word of the cross is foolishness.

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How will the “**religious**” of the world respond when told that works and outward piety through sacraments and rules that subdue the flesh will not save them? Their boast is in their religion. To the religious, the word of the cross is foolishness.

What is the purpose of the word of the cross? Paul nails it!

So that no flesh at all should be boasting in God’s sight. (1 Corinthians 1.29 cv)

The cross reduces everyone down to the lowest level where the flesh is completely severed and no one has any ground upon which to stand, and then raises up all mankind to the highest level where Christ is all in all. In the consummation of the eons, no one will be able to boast, for all will boast in God’s Son as every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Praise God for His wisdom!

But there is more, for God’s wisdom is not even on the same plane as man’s wisdom. God’s wisdom is in the Person of His Son and not merely in another set of rational thought. To those who believe, Christ has become the very wisdom of God.

In Christ.

Yet you, of Him, are **in Christ Jesus**, Who became to us **wisdom** from God, besides **righteousness** and **holiness** and **deliverance**, that, according as it is written, **He who is boasting, in the Lord let him be boasting.** (1 Corinthians 1.30-31 cv)

Have you grasped the glory of these words? Christ is not only our wisdom but our righteousness, our holiness and our deliverance. Oh, how can we refrain from making our boast in the Lord? We do not need the wisdom of man; we need Christ who is the wisdom of God. We do not need our own righteousness; we need Christ who is our righteousness. We do not need our own holiness; we need Christ who is the Holy One. We do not need to turn to the world to deliver us by its power; we need Christ who is our Deliverer and the power of God.

Dear brethren, all that is in Christ comes through the cross where our Lord Jesus was crucified. For this reason, Paul wrote: *For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified* (1 Corinthians 2.2 NASB). The world will have nothing to do with such a determination and we can expect nothing else from it, apart from the spirit of God moving upon hearts. It is folly to the mind of the old humanity.

The word of the cross is the sum total of the accomplishment of the cross, which is both an historical fact and a present and future reality. The accomplishments of the cross are the entire foundation of the word of the cross, but the glory of an

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historical fact extends throughout the eons and will be proven fully in the consummation of the eons. It is a present power for those who believe. We could say that the word of the cross is God's power in action.

Who are being saved.

The word of the cross to us who are **being saved** it is the power of God.
(1 Corinthians 1.18 cv)

When we first believe, we are saved. Let us not doubt for a moment that when the spirit of God took up residence in us and we were sealed in Christ with the Holy Spirit of promise as an earnest of our inheritance of glorified bodies (Ephesians 1.13), we were forever saved and can never lose our salvation. Many will tell us otherwise, but this is due to faulty understanding of Scripture. However, once we are saved, according to Paul's evangel, we are also *being saved*. Saved from what? Saved from the flesh that sets its desire against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh (Galatians 5.17)! Saved from our old humanity that will rob us of the joy of serving God in this life and of being enjoyers of our future allotment!

Paul declared that the power of God is for salvation for those believing. This is not a reference to the lost being saved but to the believer being saved. To the Romans, Paul declared: *For not ashamed am I of the evangel, for it is God's power for salvation to everyone who is believing* (Romans 1.16 cv).

In other words, according to the evangel, the power of God is the word of the cross. What does this mean? Simply, the power of God is the cross being applied to the life of believers to sever them from all that is of the old humanity, from the first man, Adam, and to bring them into all that is of the new humanity, in the last Adam, Christ.

The power of God conquers the old creation and the old humanity. It is a present power for one being saved, the believer, so that his or her life is severed from the flesh and any boast in the flesh, and thus is united with the person of Christ so that all boasting is in Christ.

Dear brethren, do not think for a second that you have your own power to conquer the flesh of the old humanity. If you believe, you are a new creation in Christ, who is your wisdom and power. His life in you is the life that conquers the flesh and its boasting.

Being saved is a daily saving from our flesh that would exalt itself by taking glory for itself rather than giving all the glory to God. Do not fool yourself; it is in all of us to want glory for ourselves and to receive it from man and even our brethren in Christ. Just listen to the words being spoken all around you and it won't be too long before you hear the self-exaltation of man. It may come over the airwaves, on the street corner or even from the pulpit. Only the action of the cross in our lives will keep us from such folly.

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I die daily.

Again, Paul is our example of the daily action of the cross.

Why do we also stand in jeopardy every hour? I protest by that glorifying in you, brethren, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, **I die daily.** (1 Corinthians 15.30-31 ASV)

For the ecclesias of God, Paul died daily. Is this not what the cross is all about? Most assuredly, at times, Paul's flesh must have tried to rise up to take charge on occasion as he was beaten, hounded by the messenger of Satan, hungry and cold, and as he endured many hardships. Each day he faced all sorts of perils that would have crushed most people. Thank God; the cross was operative in Paul each day he went forth to bring the evangel to the nations, even when he was imprisoned for the sake of the evangel. He died daily!

To the Corinthians, Paul made a statement that most people, even many believers, would consider foolishness. He stated: ***It is my ideal rather to be dying*** (1 Corinthians 9.15 cv). This sums up the word of the cross.

Now, knowing how some people take words like these literally, in this verse, Paul did not desire death, the state of unconsciousness. He desired to die to anything and everything that would have hindered his service in the Lord.

Are you not aware that the workers at the sacred things are eating of the things of the sanctuary? Those settling beside the altar have their portion with the altar. Thus the Lord also prescribes that those who are announcing the evangel are to be living of the evangel. Yet **I do not use any of these things.** Now I do not write these things that it may be becoming thus with me, **for it is my ideal rather to be dying, than that anyone shall be making my boast void.** (1 Corinthians 9.13-15 cv)

Take note that Paul willingly severed himself even from what was legitimately his so that his boast in the cross would not be made void. He had every right, according to Scripture, to be living of the evangel. So, why did he not use this right?

For, being free of all, I enslave myself to all, that I should be gaining the more. (1 Corinthians 9.19 cv)

Being free of all was being severed from all, even what was legitimate, so that he could be a slave to all. Is this not the word of the cross in action? Can you imagine many of the men today who have great ministries forgoing their legitimate compensation for their work for the evangel of Christ so that the boast of the cross would not be made void? Oh, where are the men of our day who are examples of the life of Paul? Who of us wakes in the morning proclaiming that our ideal is to be dying so that our boast is in the Lord?

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Old humanity crucified with Christ.

What is the key to dying daily? It is reckoning that our old humanity was crucified together with Christ. If we have been crucified with Christ, then the life we live has to be that of Christ. How else are we to live?

For if we have become planted together in the likeness of His death, nevertheless we shall be of the resurrection also, knowing this, that **our old humanity was crucified together with Him**, that **the body of Sin** may be nullified, for us by no means to be still slaving for Sin, for one who dies has been justified from Sin. (Romans 6.5-7 *CV*)

The old humanity is called the body of sin, which is the source of all boasting in the flesh and exalting oneself and standing against the wisdom and power of God. If we have believed in the Lord Jesus, then we know that we died with Christ. In other words, our old humanity died on the cross with Christ. He took our old humanity to the grave with Him and left it in the grave that we might walk in newness of life, His life.

The word of the cross begins with reckoning what Christ has done for us on the cross in relation to our old humanity.

Jesus directed His disciples to deny self, take up their cross and follow Him (Matthew 16.24). I won't deny that there is truth in our Lord's words for us today; however, I believe that our walk with the Lord, as members of His body, goes beyond taking up our cross. According to Paul, who was given great revelation by the risen Christ, we do not have a cross of our own; we have the cross of Christ, for this is where our old humanity was dealt the death blow. Consequently, I believe that we are not to embrace our own cross but to see that when Christ died on a cross for our sin, He also took our old humanity with Him. We are to reckon that we have died with Christ and that we now live by His life, by His faith and through His grace. It is true that we must not live by our old humanity, but we are never told by Paul to deny it. Rather, we are told to reckon it dead by faith.

The word of the cross tells us that we have died with Christ, for *I am crucified with Christ, and no longer live, I, but Christ lives in me; but in that I now live in flesh, I live by faith, the faith of the Son of God, who has loved me and given himself for me* (Galatians 2.20 *DNT*).

Here the flesh is spoken of in a neutral way. It simply refers to the body in which we live and not the old humanity. Notice that it is Christ through and through—crucified with Christ, Christ lives in me, the faith of the Son of God. This is where the power and wisdom of God are revealed and where the cross is operative.

How do we attain to it? By the faith of the Son of God! How is it operative in us? Through the grace of God!

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Paul's instruction to the body of Christ is to put off the old humanity and put on the new humanity (Ephesians 4.20-24; Colossians 3.9-11). How do we put off the old humanity? Again, by reckoning that it is dead! If by faith we know that it is dead, then it is not a question of denying it but of reckoning it dead. Another has died on our behalf, taking our old humanity with Him. All we must do is strip it off and not participate with it. How do we do this? By grace!

Again, Paul's life is very instructive to us. He was given such tremendous revelation of Christ and the purpose of the eons that he was in danger of his old humanity rearing its ugly head and causing him to boast in himself. To protect him from such boasting, he was given a messenger of Satan. Three times Paul asked that this thorn or splinter in the flesh be taken from him. Instead, the word of the Lord came to him.

My grace is sufficient for thee: for my power is made perfect in weakness.

Paul responded to this, not by running from or complaining about it, but by embracing it.

Most gladly therefore will **I rather glory in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.** Wherefore I take pleasure in weaknesses, in injuries, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong. (2 Corinthians 12.9-10 ASV)

Is this not the very heart of the word of the cross? In weakness, we discover the power of the cross. In weakness, the grace of God is most operative. This is the wisdom and power of God. Christ is the power of God. In a day in which strength is idolized, who is willing to glory in weakness in order to experience the power of Christ and to bring honor and glory to Him alone?

Dear brethren, how are we to live by the word of the cross? It is by grace working through faith.

Fellowship of His sufferings.

There is one more matter in relation to the word of the cross, and that is in relation to where the cross leads us. When it is operative in our lives, we know that the cross will sever us from all that is old and in Adam and all that is of the world. It will lead us to weakness in the eyes of the world and all that are living according to the old humanity. It will also lead us to suffering for Christ.

Again, Paul is our example.

More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom **I have suffered the loss of**

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all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and **the fellowship of His sufferings**, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. (Philippians 3.8-11 NASB)

Here we see that Paul was severed from all that he had at one time considered of the utmost value to him. However, when he met the risen and glorified Christ, Paul counted all that was of value as loss in view of the surpassing value of Christ. In other words, Christ was of such greater value than anything of the world or that the flesh could offer that he willingly suffered the loss of all.

Is this not how it should be for any of us who have seen the surpassing greatness of our Lord? Nothing compares with Him and nothing should compete with Him in our hearts. **Let us sanctify Christ as Lord in our hearts** (1 Peter 3.15)!

Paul not only saw it all as loss but also as rubbish so that he might gain Christ. This was the goal of Paul, and it involved a full severing so that he would gain Christ and be found in Him. But Paul did not stop at this point, for he desired to know Him in the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death.

What did Paul mean? Paul meant that he was willing to enter into the type of suffering that Jesus had prior to the cross itself. Surely, Paul could not die the death for the sin of the world as his Lord had done, but he could enter onto that sacred ground of suffering the humiliation and shame that Christ endured at the hands of man. Without a doubt, the Lord exemplified dying daily as He headed toward the cross. Rather than doing His own will, Jesus continually denied His will to do only the will of His Father, even to death on a cross.

Paul desired to follow in the footsteps of his Lord. He desired to be so conformed to the death of the Lord that he would know nothing but Christ Himself. Does the import of this grasp your heart? Paul wanted to be so severed from everything so that all that remained was Christ. This is the action of the cross in one who is serious about gaining and knowing Christ, and of **one being saved**.

Now, notice the outcome that Paul sought. It was to attain to the resurrection from among the dead. The word in the Greek should actually be translated as the *out-resurrection* from among the dead.

If by any means I might arrive at the goal, namely, the **out-resurrection** from among those who are dead. (Philippians 3.11 WABT)

Surely, Paul knew that he would be resurrected from the dead one day. Even the Jews of his day knew that. So, what was Paul trying to attain?

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Paul knew that only those who conquer or overcome while living in their bodies of humiliation or of death will be counted worthy of the first resurrection (Revelation 20.4-6) that will lead to reigning in the kingdom of Christ in the oncoming eon. After all, Jesus said: *“The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, but **those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and the resurrection from the dead**, neither marry nor are given in marriage; for they cannot even die anymore, because they are like angels, and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection”* (Luke 20.34-36 NASB).

Paul was seeking to attain to the age to come by being considered worthy of that age and the resurrection from the dead. The use of the word *from* is a clear indication that this resurrection will not include all the dead, even all the dead believers. Only those considered worthy of the next age will be resurrected. The rest will remain dead until the end of the millennial kingdom, at which time they will appear before the great white throne (Revelation 20.11-15). The believers that will be resurrected at that time will be *saved, yet so as through fire* (1 Corinthians 15.15 NASB). Paul was not seeking for this resurrection but for the one that comes 1,000 years before.

Paul was seeking to enter the sufferings of Christ that fully and unequivocally severed him from everything so that he would fully gain Christ. There would be absolutely nothing left of Paul’s old humanity, and he would enter fully onto the ground of the new creation that will come about for the body of Christ in the *out-resurrection*. In other words, Paul saw the possibility of gaining Christ in his life in such a way that he would be living as if he was actually resurrected, not in a glorified body, but in character, clothed in Christ’s perfect righteousness. This is why he wanted to know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death. It was in the fellowship of His sufferings that he would be conformed to His death; and in attaining to this death, he would know Christ in the power of His resurrection.

Why? In Christ, death must lead to resurrection life!

Paul’s goal was so great that we can imagine only a few people even start down this path. By his own admission, Paul declared: *Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus* (Philippians 3.12 NASB).

Paul was seeking to lay hold of Christ in every way he could; he sought the perfection of Christ. How was this possible? Only through the word of the cross! The cross had laid hold of Paul, and he sought to lay hold of it in Christ Jesus. When he wrote this epistle, Paul had not laid hold of it, but he continued to press on toward it. How did he do this?

Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: **forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies**

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ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3.13-14 NASB)

Notice that Paul had but one thing to do, not many but one. He forgot all that lay behind him; that is, he severed himself from all of his past, even the good past when he was zealous for the things of God and his conscious was perfectly good before God (Acts 23.1). He reached forward to what lay ahead. What was ahead for Paul and all who enter into the sufferings of Christ?

The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, **if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.** (Romans 8.16-17 NASB)

If we suffer with Christ, we will be glorified with Him. Suffering leads to the first resurrection or the *out*-resurrection, and glory! This is the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. It is to be glorified as our Lord is glorified.

For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, **but also to suffer for His sake**, experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me. (Philippians 1.29-30 NASB)

Paul's evangel does not promise a life of smooth sailing. His life was nothing of the sort, and he did not indicate that it will be any different for those who are being saved by the power of God, which is the word of the cross. Being severed is a suffering, a suffering that leads to glory.

Beloved in Christ; the world despises the word of the cross; it is an enemy of the cross. But for us who are being saved, it is the power of God. Let us allow the word of the cross to sever us from all so that we might know and gain Christ and live in these dark days as if we are on resurrection ground as we press on toward the *out*-resurrection in which we will be glorified as He is glorified.

The cross severed the Lord Jesus from this world, and it will sever us as well. At the consummation of the eons, there will be only one boast, and it will be to the glory of God as every knee bows and every tongue confesses that Jesus Christ is Lord. All will praise God's Son, the Beginning and the Consummation of the eons.

No man or creature will boast that they had any part in their arrival at the consummation of the eons. There will be one mighty voice going forth throughout creation: Grace! Grace! God's grace!

Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ (John 1.17 *cv*).

Let our boast be in the Lord!

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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Romans 1.7; 1 Corinthians 1.3; 2 Corinthians 1.2; Galatians 1.3; Ephesians 1.2; Philippians 1.2; Colossians 1.2; 1 Thessalonians 1.1; 2 Thessalonians 1.2)

There are four significant words ¹ spoken of in Scripture: the word of *the kingdom*, the word of *the cross*, the word of *the conciliation* and the word of *His grace*. Each word has great meaning in understanding the purpose of the eons and God's plan in bringing about His purpose. Ultimately, each word will extend to and encompass all mankind, not all at once but each in their era.

The word of *the kingdom*, in the context of Matthew 13, is primarily the message of the Messianic kingdom on earth in the next eon. However, the word of the kingdom is actually much bigger than this, for during the eons of the eons, Christ will head up all in heaven and on earth until He has subjected all to Himself and He fills all in all. When He has accomplished the mission given to Him by His Father, then He will deliver up the kingdom to His Father so that God may be *All* in all. At the consummation of the eons, all mankind will enter the kingdom of God to be enjoyers of God's love.

The word of *the cross*, in the context of 1 Corinthians 1.17-18, speaks of the power of the cross of Christ to sever all that is of the old humanity so that mankind can enter on the ground of all that is new. Paul purposed not to perceive anything among the saints except Jesus Christ and Him crucified (1 Corinthians 2.2). Christ is the power and wisdom of God. The old humanity from Adam has been taken to the cross and crucified with Christ (Romans 6.5-6). The cross represents a complete cutting away or severing of the old and all that has stood in the way of mankind entering into fellowship with God and being enjoyers of an allotment in His kingdom. Today, the word of the cross is for those who are being saved by the power of God—the ecclesia, which is the body of Christ. They are already a new creation in Christ. In the next eon, the nations will begin to enter onto this ground in the renascence of the millennial kingdom on earth until they enter the eon of the eons when all is new. But the word of the cross is even bigger than this, for at the consummation of the eons when death is abolished, those who had been severed from the eon of the eons through the second death will rise out of the death state to enter the all is new, and thus all mankind shall be saved through Christ.

¹ There are other words in Scripture, such as the word of God, the word of the Lord (1 Thessalonians 1.8; 4.15; 2 Thessalonians 3.1), the word of Christ (Romans 10.17; Colossians 3.16), the word of truth (2 Corinthians 6.7; Ephesians 1.13; Colossians 1.5; 2 Timothy 2.15), the word of life (Philippians 2.16), and the word of faith (Romans 10.8).

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The word of *the conciliation*, in the context of 2 Corinthians 5.18-21, speaks of God's love for the world in how He was in Christ, conciliating the world to Himself, not reckoning their offenses to them. God is making peace through the blood of His cross with the purpose of reconciling all to Himself (Colossians 1.20). Through the death and resurrection of His Son, shall *all* be made alive. Though God has made peace with mankind (conciliated), not all mankind has made peace with God so that there is complete (a full) reconciliation (mutual conciliation) between God and mankind.

However, the blood of the cross cannot be defeated and all will be reconciled to God through Christ, each in their own era. Today, the body of Christ has been reconciled to God. We are no longer enemies of God and shall be saved in the life of God's Son (Romans 5.10-11; Colossians 1.21-22). In the next two eons, mankind will progressively be reconciled until at the consummation of the eons all will be reconciled to God, and all creation will rejoice in the glory of God.

Once we understand these three words, there is one word that, we could say, sums up all the other words, for it is in this word that we discover the gracious heart of God. It is the word of *His grace*. It is the message of His grace, not our grace. It is by grace that mankind is saved and become enjoyers of God. The word of the cross declares that man has no boast, for all boasting is in the One who has conquered death and who now gives life. The word of His grace also removes all boasting, for it declares that there are no works for man to do to save himself; the Son of God has done all the work to save mankind. However, this is only the beginning of the word of His grace, for grace not only saves but also builds up and edifies with the purpose of bringing a people fully into the purpose of the eons in Christ Jesus.

And now I am committing you to God and to **the word of His grace**, which is able to edify and give the enjoyment of an allotment among all who have been hallowed. (Acts 20.32 cv)

The purpose of the eons is achieved by the grace of God and of Jesus Christ our Lord. It is the rail upon which God moves the train of His purpose through the eons. It is the fuel that fans the fire of God's passion for mankind and the world. It is the power of God that moves upon the heart of mankind to effect a change in heart. It is the discipline of God to redeem a people for His own possession. It is the persuasive power of God, a gift to mankind, to ensure that all will come into His glorious family, even if many must wait until the consummation of the eons.

Simply, there is nothing greater than the grace of God.

THE WORD OF HIS GRACE

What is grace?

Now, before looking at specific Scripture, let us look at the meaning of the word *grace*. In the Greek, the words *charis* and *chara* come from the primary verb *chairō*, which means “to be cheerful, calmly happy, or well-off.” In Scripture, it can appear as the words *farewell*, *be glad*, *rejoice*, *greeting*, and *joy-fully*. *Chara* is the word most often translated as *joy*. *Charis* is the word most often translated as *grace*. Given the meaning of the root word, it is clear that both *joy* and *grace* have something to do with a calm cheerfulness, a sense of being well-off. In other words, both words are associated with something good and pleasant.

It is instructive to see that the word *charis* is related to these other words. In fact, in some translations, the word *charis* is translated as the word *joy*, as well as the words *grace*, *gift*, *favor*, *benefit*, *pleasure* and *thanks*. However, by far, *grace* is the word most often used to translate *charis*.

This leads us to inquire as to the meaning of the word *grace*. The Concordant Version defines it as “an act producing happiness, a benefit bestowed on one who deserves the opposite, sometimes better rendered favor.” Others define it as “unmerited favor” or “unmerited pardon.” I have defined it as “the enabling power of God apart from human merit.” Webster’s Dictionary defines it as “pleasing quality, favor, good will, thanks;” “a disposition to grant something freely; favor, good will;” “the condition or fact of being favored;” “a favor or privilege;” “mercy, clemency;” “in theology, the unmerited love and favor of God toward man, or the divine influence acting in man to make him pure and morally strong, or the condition of one thus influenced.”

After studying and meditating on the word *grace* in Scripture and considering it in light of all these definitions, I feel that none of the definitions adequately captures the full heart of the word. Each might touch upon an aspect of grace but none of them encapsulates the fullness of the word. For example, Scripture tells us that the grace of God was upon the Child (Luke 2.40). How can unmerited favor or a benefit bestowed on one who deserves the opposite apply to the Son of God, who is full of grace and truth? He never deserved the opposite, for there was never any sin in Him. Further, how can we say that grace is always given freely when Scripture tells us that God gives grace to the humble but resists the proud (1 Peter 5.5)? Or, how can we say it is merely an influence when the Lord told Paul that His grace is sufficient, for His power is perfected in weakness (2 Corinthians 12.9)? Clearly, the Lord equated His grace to His power.

After spending many days meditating on this marvelous word *grace*, one morning as I sat inquiring of the Lord about its meaning, the following thought came to my mind.

Grace is “the overwhelming power of God that takes the ugly and transforms it into the joyously beautiful.”

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My heart leapt with this thought, for to me it captures the whole heart and meaning of grace. When we see something beautiful, doesn't it bring joy to our hearts? Doesn't it give us a sense of calm, well-being?

Now, the challenge is to see if this definition holds up under the scrutiny of Scripture. The challenge in doing this is that the word *grace* is so integral to the whole evangel of God that a whole book, and a rather large one at that, could be written on this subject. As such, this chapter attempts to provide an overview of the word *grace* with an encouragement to the reader to study and meditate on this marvelous word in light of Scripture and under the guidance of the spirit of God.

Mercy and grace.

Before moving on, it is needful to understand the difference between *mercy* and *grace*, which could best be described as two sides of a coin. Mercy deals with justice and grace deals with favor. *Mercy* refers to not receiving the full punishment that we deserve, and *grace* refers to receiving lavish favor that we do not deserve. The simplest way to think of these words is this: *mercy* is "restrained justice" and *grace* is "unrestrained favor." God's mercy is always operative for all mankind and will extend to the consummation of the eons, at which time grace will be extended to all as well. However, today God's grace extends exclusively to those who believe on His Son.

Use in Scripture.

As we begin, there are a few facts worth noting about the use of the word *grace* in Scripture.

The word *grace* does not appear in the gospels of Matthew or Mark, and only appears once in Luke and four times in the gospel of John. All refer to Christ. In Acts, *grace* appears eleven times, and in the epistles, *grace* appears at least 138 times.

It should not surprise us that Paul, the one who described himself as the foremost of sinners, introduces us to *the word of His grace*. At least 82 of the references to grace are found in Paul's epistles, making Paul the primary user of the word (nearly 60% of all uses in the Greek Scriptures and nearly 80% of the total found in all the epistles). Clearly, Paul stressed grace far more than all the other writers of the Greek Scriptures. He opened his letters with grace and he closed his letters with grace.

However, we must be careful in how we view these statistics; grace is not uniquely stressed by Paul, for the other writers of the epistles refer to grace as well. Peter, who experienced the abundant grace of God just like Paul, referred to

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grace thirteen times in his two epistles. ² In Acts 15.11, Peter even reminded his fellow Jewish brethren that they were saved through the same grace of the Lord Jesus as those from among the nations were saved. We could say that grace is grace, no matter who is the recipient of the grace of the Lord.

Since Paul's epistles overflow with this matter of *grace*, it behooves us to look at Paul's epistles as we study the word of His grace. After all, Paul is the one who has revealed to us the purpose of the eons, and we could say that grace is the power of God that brings about the purpose of the eons.

Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus was a mighty move of the power of God in his life. He was blinded as the risen and glorified Christ appeared to him from heaven. It was the kind of encounter that a devout Pharisee like Paul had to experience to change him from a persecutor of the ecclesia to a lover of the ecclesia. According to his testimony to Timothy, Paul was changed by the overwhelming power of the grace of God.

Overwhelming grace.

Grateful am I to Him Who invigorates me, Christ Jesus, our Lord, for He deems me faithful, assigning me a service, I, who formerly was a calumniator and a persecutor and an outrager: but I was shown mercy, seeing that I do it being ignorant, in unbelief. Yet the grace of our Lord overwhelms, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Faithful is the saying, and worthy of all welcome, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, **foremost of whom am I**. But therefore was I shown mercy, that in me, **the foremost**, Jesus Christ should be displaying all His patience, for a pattern of those who are about to be believing on Him for life eonian. (1 Timothy 1.12-16 CV)

Instead of the word *overwhelms*, other translations use the phrases *abounded exceedingly* (ASV), *surpassingly over-abounded* (DNT), *overflowing fullness* (WNT), *exceeding abundant* (REB), and *superabounded* (WAET). Each of these words or phrases has a similar meaning. Grace is not dispensed in some small or measured way. There seems to be no limit to grace, as if it is excessive. There is so much of it that it overflows and overwhelms like a mighty river that has left its banks. Have you ever seen a river that overflows its banks? When it does, it overwhelms all the dry land nearby and causes major changes in the landscape. Anything in its path is swept away. We could say that it removes all obstacles in its way. This

² A study of the word *grace* used in the epistles reveals that, by some, grace was something that was seen as coming in the future unveiling of Christ. For example, Peter wrote of the grace to be revealed at the revelation of Christ, and he referred to the grace foreseen by the Hebrew prophets. This grace is more in line with the word of the kingdom, the earthly Messianic kingdom for which the Israelites were longing. Peter did encourage those of like faith to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord (2 Peter 3.18). He also desired that grace and peace be multiplied to them (2 Peter 1.2). However, Peter never took grace to the heights that Paul did, where grace is lavished upon the body of Christ.

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is analogous to grace, only grace does not leave destruction but brings a beautiful change.

Consider the obstacle that Paul faced. He was in unbelief, which resulted in his behavior toward the ecclesia of God. How could he have overcome this obstacle that loomed larger than a mountain in his life? After all, all that he was doing as a persecutor of the ecclesia was, in his mind, justified and legitimate. He had a great zeal for the Mosaic system and the law. He had all the pedigree that gave him full confidence in the flesh that he was right in what he was doing. He could even claim that, in relation to the righteousness which is in the law, he was becoming blameless (see Philippians 3.4-6). Paul was incapable of changing his mind on this matter and making a major course adjustment in his life. To expect him or anyone else in his situation to do an about-face would be unreasonable and totally out of the question.

So what led to his change? Grace! But it was not just a little touch of grace. It was not merely a favor bestowed upon him by God, as if to say, "Alright, go ahead Paul, now believe; stop the persecution and love the brethren."

According to Scripture, **grace overwhelmed his unbelief**, or using other translations, **grace abounded exceedingly**, or **surpassingly overabounded**. The image projected by these words is of something mighty that builds up until it is so much greater than the thing before it that it completely overtakes it. It was as if Paul's attitude was a huge mountain and grace came along like a huge tidal wave much taller than his mountain and totally engulfed and overwhelmed the mountain. It bounded over it. When the tidal wave receded, the mountain was gone and what remained was a beautiful, serene valley filled with flowers. This is what grace is like.

Grace is like a mighty force or power that overwhelms obstacles in our lives that we are incapable of conquering, and when it has done its work, the result is something of beauty, which produces joy or a calm delight. In Paul's case, the obstacle was unbelief and lack of love or, we could say, hatred. Is hatred not ugly? Grace overwhelmed unbelief and hatred for God's ecclesia with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Is there anything more beautiful than love? Is there is anything more joyous?

In this case, grace was not faith and love but the vehicle by which faith and love in Christ were brought to bear on Paul's heart. Another way of stating this is that grace swooped up faith and love that are in Christ Jesus and overwhelmed Paul with this faith and love to bring about a change in his heart to believe and to love. Yet, another way of stating this is that Paul was swooped up and placed *in* Christ, who is full of faith and love, so that grace brought him into the faith and love of the Son of God.

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Is there anyone more beautiful than our Lord? Is there anyone that can bring more joy to our hearts than our Lord? There is no one more beautiful and no one who can bring us more joy than our Lord Jesus Christ. Oh, the grace of God!

Saved by grace.

Is this not what salvation is all about?

All of us were dead in our offenses and sins and were walking in accord with the eon of this world, in accord with the chief of the jurisdiction of the air, the spirit now operating in the sons of stubbornness (Ephesians 2.1-2 *cv*). We were under the jurisdiction of darkness (Colossians 1.13). We had no desire for God and His Son. We were lost in the world that stands against God and His Son. Most of us had no idea that we were lost, let alone that we were sinners.

I recall some years ago when I was sharing Christ with someone. When I began to tell the person that she was a sinner, she looked at me with sort of an incredulous look as if to say: "No, I am not a sinner. I am a good person." This person had no concept of sin in her life. Instead she had a distorted view of good and a total lack of understanding that there is none good except God. This was a big obstacle in her life.

Before our eyes were opened to the truth, we all were like this woman in varying degrees. We were blinded to the truth, and there was no way we could open the eyes of our understanding on our own.

I will never forget the day that Christ broke into my life. I was all alone reading a book (not the Bible), and Christ showed up and in an instant revealed who He is, and I was given the faith to believe in Him. The moment before, I had no real desire for God or any understanding of my need. Life was going along without any hitches in that day. But in an instant, grace overwhelmed my unbelief and the faith of the Son of God entered my heart. Did I do anything to save myself? Absolutely not!

No matter what kind of salvation experience a person has, grace must overwhelm the unbelief in the person to plant the faith of the Son of God in that person. For this reason, I do not agree with the altar calls that *demand* that the lost ask Jesus into their hearts, or open their hearts to Jesus, or confess with their mouth that He is Lord, or walk the aisle, or pray the sinner's prayer *in order to* be saved. This is a work, for it places the emphasis on the person and what he must do to save himself. There is absolutely no work that man can do to be saved. This does not imply that a person might not do or say some of these things. However, what it means is that if this is the experience of the person who is saved, the asking or confessing or walking or praying is only because the grace of God had already overwhelmed the person and his actions were merely a confirmation of what had transpired. But to say that a person was saved because he opened his mouth or

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responded to an altar call is not according to Scripture. It all begins with grace that overwhelms.

I recall quite vividly the times that I was asked to preach in the remote villages in the bush of Ghana. I never felt comfortable doing altar calls or “invitations,” so I let others take over once I preached. Sometimes no one came forward, other times a few came forward, and yet other times many came forward. As I have considered those times, I have come to the realization that it mattered not if all or none came forward. Some who came forward may not have been saved and many who did not may have been saved. I recall one man who had shot himself in the hand. I preached in his village two nights in a row and both times he came forward. I was not sure that a real change had occurred in this man, but I could look out in the crowd and see the faces of some that appeared moved in some way but did not have the courage to come forward. God knows what He did during those times, and this is all that matters.

On one occasion, we visited a village at night, and unknown to my wife and me, witchcraft was being practiced around the area in which I stood to preach. That night, the spirit of God met the crowd and the grace of God overwhelmed many with faith in Christ. When the invitation call came, there was an immediate response from many in the crowd, including a large number of younger children. They all wanted to come forward, but the crowd would have been too large for the brethren with us to handle, so they decided to meet only with a much smaller number of adults who had raised their hands. The point is that it was not a matter of us asking the newly saved to come forward. The spirit of grace had already fallen on the crowd, and the grace of God had already overwhelmed their unbelief and, we pray, the influence of witchcraft. All we were witnessing was the manifestation of the work of the grace of God and the move of the spirit of grace on hearts. It mattered not if they ever talked with any of us that night or made a move toward the front. They were saved in the spot on which they stood if the grace of God overwhelmed their unbelief. By the spirit of God, they were saved. All the glory goes to God!

We are saved by grace through faith. This was Paul’s experience and this is what Paul taught in his epistles.

But not as the offense, **thus also the grace**. For if, by the offense of the one, the many died, **much rather the grace of God and the gratuity in grace, which is of the One Man, Jesus Christ, to the many superabounds**. (Romans 5.15 CV) ³

By grace you have been saved. (Ephesians 2.5 NASB)

³ This verse reveals the reconciliation of all mankind, for through the one offense of Adam the many are dying, which refers to all mankind, but through the last Adam the grace of God superabounds to the many as well, which refers to all mankind. Where death came in for the many, grace has overwhelmed for the many.

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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, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2.8-9 NASB)

For **in grace, through faith, are you saved**, and this is not out of you; it is God's approach present, not of works, lest anyone should be boasting. (Ephesians 2.8-9 CV)

Notice that grace superabounds and that grace leads to faith. But do not overlook the fact that Paul stated you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves. It is faith that is *not* of ourselves. In other words, even faith is not ours, as if somehow we work up the faith to be saved. If we did, we would have something to boast in, but as it is we have no boast. Paul declared to the Galatians that he lived by the faith of the Son of God (Galatians 2.20 DNT). It was not Paul's faith but the Son's faith. It is Christ through and through in regard to salvation.

We can be assured that when Paul penned these words, he thought back on the day that grace overwhelmed his unbelief. This is why he was so clear in his emphasis on being saved by grace through faith. For Paul, there was no other way, based on his experience; and it must be the same experience for all who are being saved in this day. Paul had no boast in his salvation, and he knew that no one could ever boast in their salvation, as well; if they did, it would be because they were on the ground of their own works and not on the ground of Christ that saves. We believe through grace and nothing else!

Paul was not alone in this truth, for when the council at Jerusalem was convened to examine the salvation of the gentiles as taught by Paul, Peter stood and stated: *"But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are"* (Acts 15.11 NASB). ⁴ Later in Acts, Apollos, an Alexandrian by birth, was in Ephesus speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus. However, when he spoke in the synagogue, Priscilla and Aquila heard him and realized that he was not entirely accurate, so they took him aside and taught him. It is recorded that he then went to Achaia and greatly helped those *who had believed through grace*, for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ (see Acts 18.23-28 NASB). Surely, he refuted the Jews that continued to look to the flesh.

⁴ It is interesting how Peter first of all acknowledged that the nations or gentiles were saved by grace and then he said that they, meaning the Jews, were also saved by grace, just as the nations. It was almost as if the Jews did not realize this great truth and had to be reminded. This should not be a surprise, for some of the Jewish believers looked down upon the gentile believers because they continued to see the Jewish believers as a special class above the gentile believers. In other words, grace was not the key to salvation for those who had all the promises and covenants. The flesh still counted for something in their minds. Of course, Paul's teaching completely removed the flesh and its benefits. He determined to know no one according to the flesh (2 Corinthians 5.16).

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Justified gratuitously in His grace.

Paul also revealed the great truth that we are justified in His grace.

Yet now, apart from law, a righteousness of God is manifest (being attested by the law and the prophets), yet a righteousness of God through Jesus Christ's faith, for all, and on all who are believing, for there is no distinction, for all sinned and are wanting of the glory of God. **Being justified gratuitously in His grace**, through the deliverance which is in Christ Jesus (Whom God purposed for a Propitiatory shelter, through faith in His blood, for a display of His righteousness because of the passing over of the penalties of sins which occurred before in the forbearance of God), toward the display of His righteousness in the current era, for Him to be just and a Justifier of the one who is of the faith of Jesus. (Romans 3.21-26 cv)

Yet when the kindness and fondness for humanity of our Saviour, God, made its advent, not for works which are wrought in righteousness which we do, but according to His mercy, He saves us, through the bath of renaissance and renewal of holy spirit, which He pours out on us richly through Jesus Christ, our Saviour, that, **being justified in that One's grace**, we may be becoming enjoyers, in expectation, of the allotment of life eonian. (Titus 3.4-7 cv)

When grace overwhelmed, we were not only saved by grace through faith but also justified in grace. The unjust were made to be just, just as if they had not sinned. The *Just* died for the unjust that we might stand before God just. This is more than pardon for sins or forgiveness of sins. It is a complete wiping away of all sin. Of course, this is only possible through the blood of Christ.

There is much more in this matter of what we could call saving grace.

Standing in grace.

Grace overwhelms with faith, and we are not only justified by grace but also justified by faith so that we may have peace toward God.

Being, then, justified by faith, we may be having peace toward God, through our Lord, Jesus Christ, through Whom we have the access also, by faith, **into this grace in which we stand**, and we may be glorying in expectation of the glory of God. (Romans 5.1-2 cv)

What is the grace into which we are to stand? It is having peace toward God, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ has made the way for us to have peace toward God. What is peace toward God? It is reconciliation with God. By faith, we are to stand in the grace of being reconciled with God. In other words, we are no longer enemies of God and there is mutual conciliation. God is at peace with us

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and we are to be at peace with God. By standing in this grace, we see the hope or expectation of our future glory.

Yet God is commending this love of His to us, seeing that, while we are still sinners, Christ died for our sakes. Much rather, then, being now justified in His blood, we shall be saved from indignation, through Him. For if, being enemies, **we were conciliated to God through the death of His Son**, much rather, **being conciliated, we shall be saved in His life**. Yet not only so, but we are glorying also in God, through our Lord, Jesus Christ, **through Whom we now obtained the conciliation**. (Romans 5.8-11 cv)

Through grace we obtain the conciliation by which we may be reconciled to God (see Colossians 1.20-22). Do you see how marvelous grace is? It takes that which was an enemy to God, something that we could call ugly, and overwhelms this adversity to bring about peace between God and His creatures, which is a joyous and beautiful thing.

Sin dethroned by grace.

Objectively speaking, the penalty for sin has been removed for all who believe; however, the ability to sin continues to reside even in believers because we continue to live in bodies of death. Death passed through into all mankind, on which all sinned (Romans 5.12 cv). Sin is ugly and it destroys our peace and joy. But the good news is that sin does not have to have a hold in the life of any believer. Why? Because grace dethrones sin, and where sin might increase, grace superexceeds it.

For if, by the offense of the one, death reigns through the one, much rather, those **obtaining the superabundance of grace and the gratuity of righteousness shall be reigning in life through the One, Jesus Christ**. (Romans 5.17 cv)

Yet law came in by the way, that the offense should be increasing. Yet where sin increases, grace superexceeds, that, even as Sin reigns in death, thus **Grace also should be reigning through righteousness, for life eonian, through Jesus Christ, our Lord**. (Romans 5.20-21 cv)

What, then, shall we declare? **That we may be persisting in sin that grace should be increasing? May it not be coming to that!** We, who died to sin, how shall we still be living in it? (Romans 6.1-2 cv)

Grace is sovereign over sin, for grace reigns in life.

Now, some people think that grace allows one to sin at will. However, this is not what Paul stated. In fact, he stated just the opposite. It is grace in action that keeps one from sin; it does not lead one into further sin. By the same token, if sin

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does get the best of a person, grace is all the more effective, for when sin increases, grace not only increases but superexceeds over sin. In other words, grace conquers sin; it overwhelms sin in our life. Once the grace of God gets hold of our heart, we will not desire to persist in sin but will desire to obtain the superabundance of grace that conquers every bit of sin in us. Thus, grace should reign through righteousness, for life eonian or life for the coming ages that we should no longer be living in sin but living righteously through our Lord.

Oh, the glory of grace!

Rescued by grace.

In Romans 7, Paul recounted the turmoil that he experienced in his body. He wanted to do the right things, to do good, but he could not. The practices that he hated to do, he did. Sin was making its home in him, and he hated it. He needed to be rescued from this death.

A wretched man am I! **What will rescue me out of this body of death? Grace!** I thank God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. (Romans 7.24-25a cv) ⁵

Paul saw that it is grace that rescues him, and all of us, out of the body of death. His heart was filled with thankfulness to God, for he knew that this grace comes through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Consequently, there is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus (Romans 8.1). Through the reign of grace, believers are beyond the fear of wrath and can enter the higher ground of living righteously, even beyond what the law had demanded of the Israelites.

Fall from grace.

In relation to the law, one of the greatest stumbling blocks to the Jews was their insistence that the works of the flesh entered into salvation. In Romans 7, Paul struggled between the law and grace and, thank God, grace won. However, this does mean that the law was done away with, for it most surely is still active and will remain so throughout the eons. Later, in his Romans epistle, Paul exposed his heart for his Israelite brethren and revealed that a remnant was saved by grace.

Thus, then, in the current era also, there has come to be a remnant according to **the choice of grace. Now if it is in grace, it is no longer out of works, else the grace is coming to be no longer grace. Now, if it is out of works, it is no longer grace, else the work is no longer work.** (Romans 11.5-6 cv)

⁵ The word *grace* is found in at least one of the ancient Greek manuscripts used in the translation of Scripture, and it fits perfectly with Paul's evangel.

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In other words, in regard to choice, grace and works do not mix. In the matter of salvation, there are no works; it is all by grace.

When believers start to mix grace and works together regarding salvation or move from simply grace to works, according to Paul, they fall away from grace. This was the problem with the believers in Galatia.

For freedom did Christ set us free: stand fast therefore, and be not entangled again in a yoke of bondage. Behold, I Paul say unto you, that, if ye receive circumcision, Christ will profit you nothing. Yea, I testify again to every man that receiveth circumcision, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Ye are severed from Christ, ye who would be justified by the law; **ye are fallen away from grace.** (Galatians 5.1-4 ASV)

This does not mean that they were lost or that we can lose our salvation, as so many teach. We cannot lose our salvation! What it does mean is that believers lose the benefit that grace affords them in their daily living. They move out of the sphere in which grace operates and they lose all the benefit derived from being under grace, and they once again move onto the ground of the law and must be judged accordingly. We could say they lose the beautiful and come under the ugly; they lose the joyful and come under the sorrowful. As Paul exhorted the Corinthians, do not receive the grace of God in vain (2 Corinthians 6.1 NASB).

Under grace.

In reference to sin and the law, Paul declared: *For Sin shall not be lording it over you, for you are not under law, but under grace. What then? Should we be sinning, seeing that we are not under law, but under grace? May it not be coming to that!* (Romans 6.14-15 cv).

We are not under a tutor as were the Israelites (Galatians 3.24-25). Now, all are under grace (Jew and gentile alike), which is a far greater power. The law only condemned and brought failure and never changed the heart. But grace builds up and brings glory, and changes the most hardened heart.

Dear brethren, being under grace is how God edifies and builds His house, to His glory.

Edified and built up by grace.

As he was departing from the elders of the Ephesians ecclesia, Paul committed them to God and to the word or message of His grace.

And now I am committing you to God and to **the word of His grace**, which is able to edify and give the enjoyment of an allotment among all who have been hallowed. (Acts 20.32 cv)

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And now I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you the inheritance among all them that are sanctified. (Acts 20.32 ASV)

Some translations use the word *edify* and others use the words *build up*, but either one gives the thought of growth with a view to a future joy in God's kingdom, which is the meaning of the enjoyment of an allotment. What is God building today? He is building a house, a spiritual house. Years later, Paul encouraged the Ephesians that they were being built together for God's dwelling place, in spirit (Ephesians 2.22 cv).

Simply, grace builds up and edifies so that the sanctified will enter into the joy of the coming eons when Christ heads up all in the heavens and on the earth. Grace is intimately joined with the purpose of the eons. We could say it is the means by which God brings His people into His purpose and ensures that they will become enjoyers of it, not only in the coming eons but even in our present wicked eon. Do not put everything out into the future, for, in some measure today, God wants us to be enjoyers of what is to come. How are we to do this? By exercising the grace that is given to each of us!

Gifts by grace.

Each member of the body of Christ is called into a labor of love for the brethren. Consider these verses.

And having gifts differing according to **the grace** that was given to us.... (Romans 12.6 ASV)

Now, having graces excelling, in accord with **the grace** which is given to us.... (Romans 12.6 cv)

I thank my God always concerning you, for **the grace of God** which was given you in Christ Jesus; that in everything ye were enriched in him, in all utterance and all knowledge; even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you: so that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye be unproveable in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 1.4-8 ASV)

Now to each one of us was **given grace** in accord with the measure of the gratuity of Christ. (Ephesians 4.7 cv)

Concordantly speaking, the word *gift* is translated *graces*. We are given graces in accord with the grace given. In other words, the gifting that we are given is in proportion to the grace that is given.

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How are we to exercise our gifts among one another? We are to do it in such a manner that it edifies and builds up and does not tear down our brethren. Paul gave one such example in his Ephesians epistle.

Let no tainted word at all be issuing out of your mouth, but if any is good toward needful edification, that it may be **giving grace to those hearing**. (Ephesians 4.29 cv)

Do you realize that when we open our mouths to our brethren in Christ, we should be giving grace to those hearing? Why? Because grace edifies and edification causes the body to grow in love!

Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for **the building up of itself in love**. (Ephesians 4.15-16 NASB)

It is the grace of the Lord that leads us and shows us how to love one another. At times, it may be difficult to love, particularly when we find ourselves in personality clashes with our brethren, but Paul is our example to follow.

Like Stephen, the martyr who was full of grace, Paul was full of grace and he sought only to build up and edify the ecclesias; he did not seek to pull them down or destroy them (2 Corinthians 10.8). He died daily for the ecclesia (1 Corinthians 15.31). How did he do it? By the grace that was given to him!

According to **the grace of God** which was given unto me, as a wise master builder I laid a foundation; and another buildeth thereon. (1 Corinthians 3.10a ASV)

To be a master builder of Christ, Paul obtained grace and apostleship for faith-obedience among the nations (Romans 1.5 cv; see also Romans 12.3; 15.15; Ephesians 3.2, 7, 8). He labored by grace.

Labored with grace.

But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not found vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. (1 Corinthians 15.10 ASV)

Paul took no credit for his life in the Lord. He was a product of the grace of God. He was what he was by the grace of God. What was Paul before the grace of God overwhelmed him with faith and love? He was a persecutor of the ecclesia of God. Because of this, Paul declared that he was the least of the apostles. But the grace of God given to him was so abundant that he labored, even more abundantly than all the other apostles. Paul was not bragging in himself; he was giving God the

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glory for His marvelous, abundant grace. The grace of God was with Paul. Surely, in Paul's mind, this grace was unmerited. It was the grace of God working with Paul that made him what he was and that led him to lay down his life each day for faith-obedience among the nations. Praise God for the work of grace!

Paul is our example of one who was stripped of all that counted for something in his day and among his Israelite brethren. He was brought to nothing in himself. He was lowered to the depths of self/essness. But then Paul was lifted to the heights of glory to see and hear things that no man had ever experienced. He described them as the surpassing greatness of the revelations. However, the receipt of great revelation required overwhelming grace. We could say that grace had to exceed the revelation.

Sufficient is My grace.

Because of **the surpassing greatness of the revelations**, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself! Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. And He has 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, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. (2 Corinthians 12.7-9 NASB)

“Sufficient for you is My grace, for My power in infirmity is being perfected.” With the greatest relish, then, will I rather be glorying in my infirmities, that the power of Christ should be tabernacling over me. Wherefore I delight in infirmities, in outrages, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake, for, whenever I may be weak, then I am powerful. (2 Corinthians 12.9-10 cv)

To keep Paul from exalting himself, the Lord allowed a messenger of Satan to torment him. The revelation given to Paul by the Lord was great, and he needed to be protected from self-exaltation. It was for Paul's good, as well as for those he reached through his evangel, including us. Whatever this thorn or splinter in the flesh was, it was something that taxed Paul so much that he pleaded with the Lord to remove it. Three times he pleaded before the Lord until the Lord spoke to him: *“My grace is sufficient for you!”* It was not Paul's grace but the Lord's grace that He had given to Paul for the service he was called to discharge to the nations.

The Lord did not leave Paul in the dark on the matter. He could have told Paul that His grace was sufficient and said no more, as if to say that that was all he needed to know. In His graciousness, the Lord told Paul that it was for his own good, for this was the only way for His power to be perfected in Paul. Christ's strength was to come from Paul's own weakness, for this was when Christ's power kicked in, and Paul experienced the all-sufficiency of the Lord's grace.

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Paul came to see that his boast was in his weakness, for this was when the power of Christ tabernacled over him, and he was most powerful in the service he was commissioned to discharge.

If we want to know the all-sufficient grace of Christ, we too must be brought to the place of weakness so that Christ's power can tabernacle over us. The world looks at weakness as a sign of failure, but God looks at it as the greatest opportunity for the manifestation of the power of Christ. God makes stupid the wisdom of the world. During this eon, it is through God's grace that we are trained to serve Him and to be set apart as His cleansed people, a people readied for the eons of the eons.

Trained by grace.

For **the saving grace of God** made its advent to all humanity, **training us** that, disowning irreverence [deny ungodliness] and worldly desires, we should be living sanely [sensibly] and justly [righteously] and devoutly [godly] in the current eon, anticipating that happy expectation, even the advent of the glory of the great God and our Saviour; Jesus Christ, Who gives Himself for us, that He should be redeeming us from all lawlessness and be cleansing for Himself a people to be about Him, zealous for ideal acts. (Titus 2.11-14 CV [NASB])

The saving grace of God not only saved us but continues to save us by training us. We need to be trained in the way of reverence, righteousness, and godliness, and often this training requires the disciplining hand or spank of a loving Father. His hand of discipline can be very strong and yet full of sympathy at the same time.

Peter used a similar expression when he encouraged those of like faith to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3.18 NASB). We grow in grace by being trained by grace because training is for the purpose of growth, just as a child must grow up to be an adult, shedding childish behavior.

The Greek word from which *train* is translated means "hit" and refers to discipline. It is more than merely teaching or speaking words; it is training as a child would be trained, and this requires discipline. Paul's thorn in the flesh was for discipline, and every child of God who is going on in the Lord must come under the discipline of God. The same Greek word, often translated *discipline*, is used in the Hebrews epistle.

My son, do not disdain the discipline of the Lord, nor yet faint when being exposed by Him. For whom the Lord is loving He is disciplining, yet He is scourging every son to whom He is assenting. **For discipline are you enduring.** As to sons is God bringing it to you, for what son is there whom the father is not disciplining? (Hebrews 12.5-7 CV; see Proverbs 3.11, 12)

Some translations use the word *chastening* in the place of *discipline*.

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Grace is given to those being saved so that they can live a holy life and be a people cleansed for the Lord that, in some measure during this eon, are zealous for ideal or good acts that reflect their destiny for the eons of the eons. Our behavior before the world and even our brethren in Christ is to be in holiness and sincerity of God, and this only comes through the disciplining work of the grace of God. If we get off track in a way that will not prepare us for our destiny or will lead us away from holiness, then the strong hand of God must be applied to our lives. But always remember, it is a hand of love and one full of tender mercy. It can be strong and loving at the same time. This is the two sides of grace, strength and beauty, which should lead us to be glorifying in the testimony of a good conscience, as Paul, our example, manifested in his life of service to the Lord and His people.

For our glorifying is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and sincerity of God, not in fleshly wisdom but **in the grace of God**, we behaved ourselves in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward. (2 Corinthians 1.12 ASV)

Dear brethren, grace demands character in a world that is character-*less*. Character refers to a life that is full of the grace of God, which includes such attributes as graciousness, nobleness, dignity, love, holiness, and sincerity. We are called to be a people for His own possession, and we must reflect the life of the One who has redeemed us and is in us. We are to be purified and cleansed for Him. When we enter the celestial kingdom, we will be like Him. Until then, let us reflect His life. By His grace, we will!

However, in a world that has become increasingly harsh, more brutal, less loving, and more and more downright ugly, grace might appear as something too soft and perhaps too weak or gentle. Actually, it is nothing of the sort. Grace is strength (power) and beauty, which truly reflects our Lord Jesus.

Be strong in the grace.

At the end of his life in the body of death, Paul wrote his last epistle and, we could say, his last testament, which was sent to his beloved Timothy. Obviously, he wanted to leave his son in the faith some final words of encouragement and edification so that he would continue on in the faith after his dissolution (death). Grace was on Paul's mind in this regard.

Thou therefore, my son, **be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.**
(2 Timothy 2.1 KJV)

Other translations use the words *be invigorated* or *be empowered* in the place of *be strong*.

It was not Timothy's grace but Christ's grace, and Timothy was to find his strength in this grace. *Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.* This was not

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a call to weakness but to strength. It was not a call to his ability or power but to the strength afforded to him in Christ's grace.

Oh, this word needs to echo in the chambers of our heart until it is planted into our daily thoughts. Be strong in the grace! Don't retreat or quiver under the stress of these dark days. Be strong in the grace!

What did, and does, this mean to Timothy and to us as well? Paul continued by exhorting Timothy to suffer hardship, run the race by competing according to the rules, work hard for the evangel and the eonian glory to come, remember Jesus Christ who was roused from among the dead, ⁶ be faithful to the Lord and endure so that he might reign in the coming eon (see 2 Timothy 2.3-13). This is the pathway of one who is pressing on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3.14 NASB).

How was Timothy to press on in this way? It was by being strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus! Simply, it was by grace! How are we to press on? By grace! There is no other way. By grace, we are to be pressing on toward the goal for the prize. It is an upward call, a call to be among the celestials in the eons of eons, and beyond.

The lavish, transcendent riches of His grace.

In what is considered one of his greatest epistles, the circular letter commonly titled *Ephesians*, Paul unveiled the secret of the celestial destiny of the body of Christ. In this regard, Paul presented the transcendent riches of His grace that He lavishes on us. *Lavish* refers to something extravagant or more than enough. *Transcendent* refers to something surpassing, excelling or extraordinary. It is so great that it is beyond any human experience we have on this earth, but it is not beyond our knowledge. *Riches* refer to things that are of great value and wealth. It is as if Paul could not find words full enough to express the grace of God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

As revealed in Ephesians 1-2, consider the lavish grace of God that overwhelms the body of Christ. ⁷

Blessed with every spiritual blessing among the celestials, in Christ (1.3).

Chosen in Him before the disruption of the world to be holy and flawless in His sight (1.4).

⁶ Paul injected the resurrection of Christ because His resurrection was a source of controversy. Some denied His bodily resurrection and others saw it as merely a spiritual resurrection. However, Paul injected the fact that Christ was of the seed of David to prove that he was a Man and that His resurrection was as a Man in a body, in the literal sense.

⁷ Some portions of these verses have been deliberately left out and other words added to provide clarity. The reader is encouraged to read the entire chapters.

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In love, **designated beforehand** for the place of a son for Him through Christ Jesus; in accord with the delight of His will, for the praise of the glory of His grace, which graces us in the Beloved (1.5-6).

Having the deliverance through His blood, **the forgiveness of offenses** in accord with the riches of His grace, which He lavishes on us; in all wisdom and prudence (1.7-8).

Making known to us the secret of His will to head up all in the Christ—both that in the heavens and that on the earth (1.9-10).

Being designated beforehand according to the purpose of the One Who is operating all in accord with the counsel of His will, that we should be for the laud [praise] of His glory, who are expecting the Christ before the wrath comes (1.11-12).

Sealed with the holy spirit of promise (which is an assurance of the enjoyment of our allotment that will come in the next eon) for the laud or praise of His glory! (1.13-14).

Made alive together in Christ because of God's vast love with which He loves us (2.4-5).

Raised together and seated together among the celestials, in Christ Jesus, so that, in the oncoming eons, He should be displaying the transcendent or extraordinary riches of His grace in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus (2.6-7).

Oh, the vast love of God with which He loves us! What Paul saw and tried to convey in his epistle is almost beyond comprehension. It is almost too good to be true. But dear brethren, it is true!

This is the evangel of Paul of which he became a dispenser, in accord with the gratuity of the grace of God. He was less than the least of all saints, but he was granted overwhelming grace to bring the evangel of the untraceable riches of Christ to the nations. The transcendent riches of His grace usher saints into the untraceable riches of Christ. We can only trace the riches of Christ given to the Hebrew prophets as they saw in bits and pieces, fragments. However, Paul, by God's grace, was given revelation that no man had ever been given. It cannot be traced back in time as revealed to other men, for Paul alone was given revelation of the glorious secret of the celestial destiny and blessing of a new creation called *the ecclesia, which is the body of Christ*.

Paul was charged to enlighten all as to how God plans to administer the secret, which has been concealed from the eons in God. This secret is now beginning to be made known to the sovereignties and the authorities among the celestials, through the ecclesia, which is the body of Christ. It is through the ecclesia that

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the multifaceted wisdom of God is being made known among the celestials, in accord with the purpose of the eons, which He makes in Christ Jesus, our Lord; in Whom we have boldness and access with confidence, through His faith (see Ephesians 3.6-12 cv).

Do you understand what this means? In Christ, God has taken a people who deserve nothing less than death, overwhelmed their unbelief with the faith of the Son of God, and then raised them up in Christ, blessed them with every spiritual blessing among the celestials, and seated them together among the celestials *in* Christ. Why is this being made known among the celestials? Because the ecclesia of God is destined to reign among the celestials! We are not destined for the wrath of God or the second death resulting from the great white throne judgment, but to be holy and flawless in the sight of God among the celestials.

Today, all of this is a spiritual reality that is only discerned in the spirit. But the spirit of promise within us tells us that one day we will literally enter the spiritual realm among the celestials to reign with Christ and be part of His glorious work of heading up all things in the heavens and on the earth. Hallelujah! ⁸

This is in accord with the purpose of the eons, which is in accord with the counsel of His will. This is the lavish, transcendent riches of the grace of God!

Do you realize that if you believe in Christ, you have been called with a holy calling, in accord with His purpose and grace?

In accord with His purpose and grace.

You may not be ashamed, then, of the testimony of our Lord, nor yet of me, His prisoner, but suffer evil with the evangel in accord with the power of God, Who saves us and calls us with a holy calling, not in accord with our acts, but **in accord with His own purpose and the grace which is given to us in Christ Jesus before times eonian**, yet now is being manifested through the advent of our Saviour, Christ Jesus, Who, indeed, abolishes death, yet illuminates life and incorruption through the evangel of which I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher of the nations. (2 Timothy 1.8-11 cv)

God not only saves us, but He calls us, not in accord with anything we do but in accord with His purpose and the grace which is given to us in Christ Jesus. Grace is never based on our works; works never enter into the picture. Grace is gratuitously or freely given by God because He has purposed it that way. Do not

⁸ Living in the spiritual realm among the celestials requires entering a dimension beyond the physical. Today, we cannot see the angels or other celestial beings, even though they might be all around us. We cannot see them because they live in another dimension that we are not suited for in our bodies of death. We must be changed into the body of the glory of our Lord to enter this realm.

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argue with it; rather, embrace it with open arms. Grace is the most liberating power in the entire universe.

Notice that His own purpose and grace was set in the heart of God before the eons. This alone should relieve us of any notion that works enter into the equation. If you believe, then you are spiritually seated among the celestials today, awaiting the literal manifestation of this glory when you are beyond death in the resurrection and the snatching away to Christ in the air. Christ Jesus abolishes death and brings us into life immortal.

This is the evangel of Paul, the apostle and teacher of the nations. It is the evangel of the lavish grace of God in Christ Jesus!

The beauty of holiness.

In many respects, we have merely touched upon the glorious subject of grace. However, in conclusion, let us revisit the definition of grace.

Grace is “the overwhelming power of God that takes the ugly and transforms it into the joyously beautiful.”

There is no doubt that fallen mankind in the grip of death is something ugly, which only produces sorrow and grief. Even our Lord Jesus, the Man of sorrows as He walked this earth, suffered the ugliness of death so that all shall be made alive in Him. The grace of God was upon Him as a Child so that He could grow up to be the Man to die for the sin of the world.

No one truly rejoices in death. Jesus’ closest disciples did not rejoice in their Master’s death at the first. But their grief was transformed into joy as they saw the beauty of the Lord after He was raised from among the dead.

The evangel of God is that, in Christ, by His grace, everything is transformed into beauty, a beauty that brings joy to the heart. The lavish grace of God takes those who are chosen in Him before the disruption of the world and transforms them into a vessel that is holy and flawless in His sight. As the Psalmist, David, praised Jehovah, giving Him the glory due His name, he declared: *Worship Jehovah in the beauty of holiness* (Psalm 29.2 MKJV).

This is the transforming work of the lavish grace of God. The body of Christ is to be the complement of Christ, the complete expression of Christ. Grace is leading His body into the beauty of holiness. In that glorious day, all who come into this beauty will have that calm-delight, the joy experienced when all is well in Christ.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brethren! Amen!

5. THE WORD OF THE CONCILIATION

One of the most profound, and yet lost, truths of Scripture is the conciliation of God, which is uniquely found in the writings of Paul, the apostle of the nations. The body of Christ is called to be ambassadors for Christ in taking *the word of the conciliation* to the nations. It is the message of God's love.

So that, if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: the primitive passed by. Lo! there has come new! Yet all is of **God, Who conciliates us to Himself through Christ**, and is giving us **the dispensation of the conciliation**, how that God was in Christ, **conciliating the world** to Himself, not reckoning their offenses to them, and placing in us **the word of the conciliation**. For Christ, then, are we ambassadors, as of God entreating through us. We are beseeching for Christ's sake, "**Be conciliated to God!**" For the One not knowing sin, He makes to be a sin offering for our sakes that we may be becoming God's righteousness in Him. (2 Corinthians 5.17-21 cv)

How can we be ambassadors for Christ if we do not have the word of the conciliation in us, that is, written on our hearts? Unfortunately, this word is not taught from the pulpits of Christendom in our day. It is safe to state that many have not even heard of this word. They may have heard of reconciliation, but today this word is most often used in reference to making peace with others and not in reference to making peace with God.

The word of the conciliation declares to all mankind: "*Be conciliated to God.*"

Now, let us consider the word of the conciliation, and to do this we need to lay a foundation upon which to build.

They are without excuse.

First, we need to see that mankind can try to deny that there is a God, but God has placed within everyone the evidence that He exists. All are without excuse.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because **that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them**. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, **so that they are without excuse**. (Romans 1.18-20 NASB)

God is the Creator of all! All mankind needs to do is look at the creation; look at the mountains and the rolling seas; look at a rabbit with a cotton tail; look at a

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new-born baby; look at the amazing body in which mankind lives—can anyone truthfully say that there is no God? We live in bodies that are so intricate with parts that are very specialized and that work together. The human body is a community made up of a multitude of living cells that all work together without us even knowing what they are doing. Consider the intricacy of the eye; light enters the eye and is converted to impulses that are conveyed to the brain where an image is perceived. Yet all of this is accomplished in a body which is 80% water. It is truly remarkable.

We look around us and see all sorts of man-made objects that are a marvel to behold. Who cannot marvel at a rocket propelling into space or at how a computer is able to do so much for us today?

None of these inventions of man happened by chance. They did not grow out of some sort of chaos, going from chaos to order. They started out as an assortment of materials that man had to put together after he planned what they were to look like and what they were to do when built. If no one ever touched them, they would remain as separate parts with no functionality.

Then how can mankind look at the universe, the earth on which we live and the bodies which we occupy and say that there is no God? Our order comes from a God of order, a creative Genius beyond comprehension.

None are right before God.

Mankind was created not only to see and know God in His creation but to be in His image and to walk before God, living in communion with Him, knowing His Divine love and ruling with God over His creation.

Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule. (Genesis 1.26 NASB)

However, the first man, Adam, disobeyed God, and when he did, the process of death entered all mankind. In the day that you disobey, *to die shall you be dying*, was the word from God to Adam. Death passed through into all mankind, and Adam's race became a dying race, a race of sinners. The ration (wage, allowance) of sin is death.

The proof that death is the ration of sin is in the fact that *all* die (state of unconsciousness where we know nothing [Ecclesiastes 9.5]), and their bodies return to the dust of the earth. In fact, every living thing on earth faces death. Even creation itself groans in its slavery to corruption. Earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes, volcanic eruptions, famine, pestilence, to name a few, are proof.

God's assessment of mankind is this—*all* have sinned, that is, all have failed to meet God's righteous demand. No one is right before God.

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“There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one. Their throat is an open grave, with their tongues they keep deceiving, the poison of asps is under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness; their feet are swift to shed blood, destruction and misery are in their paths, and the path of peace have they not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes.” (Romans 3.10-18 NASB)

All mankind die (go into a state of unconsciousness), and their bodies return to the soil. To mankind, death is a hopeless tomb. No one, not one single person is able to come alive and rise out of the grave by his own power, never to die again! This is the hopeless lot of man. But there is good news of a great hope! Man's failure is according to God's plan and God Himself has provided the remedy. We could say that God alone is responsible for mankind.

God has conciliated the world—His enemies.

God has allowed man to fail, even required it, so that all mankind would know His love. To know *love*, we need the contrast of *hate*. To know *good*, we need the contrast of *evil*. To know *light*, we need the contrast of *dark*. To know *righteousness*, we need the contrast of *sin*. Man's greatest failure is for God's greatest glory! This is the wisdom of God.

Since God Himself is responsible for mankind's fate, man is not responsible for his own salvation. A sinner cannot save himself from sin and death. A sinner has no righteousness or rightness to stand before God. A sinner can do nothing to please a righteous, holy God. A sinner cannot find favor and peace with God on his own merits or works. A sinner cannot overcome death. A sinner is an enemy of God who deserves the wrath or indignation of God, but never an eternal torture chamber called hell!

The fact of the matter is that in His love, God has shut up *all* in disobedience that He might show mercy to *all* (Romans 11.32 NASB). *All* is an inclusive word, which means that none are left out. God's heart is to show mercy to *all* mankind, without exception. No one is excluded from His mercy, even the vilest and most corrupt sinner. Simply, God has provided the way for *all*, all of His enemies, to be at peace with Him.

There is good news. God is not angry with mankind and does not desire mankind to suffer the fate of death forever. Mankind is not His enemy. After all, we are commanded to love our enemies (Matthew 5.44). Will God not do likewise? He wills that all be saved (1 Timothy 2.4). He has made peace with mankind, and one day death will be no more.

God has ***conciliated*** the world to Himself, not reckoning their offenses to them (2 Corinthians 5.19 cv). This is the grace and mercy of God. The word

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conciliated means “to win over, to soothe the anger of, to gain favor.” In other words, God Himself has made peace with His enemies. He is not angry with mankind. God has made peace with all, and He is calling all mankind to be at peace with Him.

In order for mankind to be conciliated to God (peace with God), it is important to understand how God conciliated mankind to Himself (peace with mankind); how He has brought favor and peace to mankind and ultimately has overcome the mighty power of death. God has accomplished this great act of love in, through and by His Son.

God's Son empties Himself to die.

The most profound act of love in all the universe is that God sent His Son to this earth to take on the form of man and to be nailed to a cross by mankind that He created, and to shed His blood and die as if He were the foulest of sinners, although He never knew nor ever committed sin. The wrath of God fell upon His Son to pay for the sin of the world. The *Just* died for the unjust! He died for the sin of the world. The *Righteous* became sin and died that mankind might become the righteousness of God in Him. He is the *Savior* of the world and His name is *Jesus!*

The sinner may be most repugnant and offensive, but today God does not reckon these offenses against him or her. God is not holding man's sins against him, for Christ died for man's sins. No sinner could die for the sin of the world. Everyone born of Adam's race is disqualified from shedding their own blood for the sin of the world. But *One* who was not a sinner died for *all* the sin of the world! This is what God's Son has done so that God can be at peace with mankind. He has done *all* the work necessary to conciliate mankind to God, and God wants *mankind* to know His peace *today*.

Who, [Jesus] being inherently in the form of God, deems it not pillaging to be equal with God, nevertheless empties Himself, taking the form of a slave, coming to be in the likeness of humanity, and, being found in fashion as a human, He humbles Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore, also, God highly exalts Him, and graces Him with the name that is above every name, that in the name of Jesus every knee should be bowing, celestial and terrestrial and subterranean, and every tongue should be acclaiming that Jesus Christ is Lord, for the glory of God, the Father. (Philippians 2.6-11 cv)

Yet all is of God, **Who conciliates us to Himself through Christ.** (2 Corinthians 5.18 cv)

Being enemies, **we were conciliated to God through the death of His Son.** (Romans 5.10 cv)

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Do you grasp the greatness of these words? All of us were enemies of God; and yet while we were still enemies, in His love for mankind, God sent His Son to die for us and conciliate us to Himself through Christ. *Today*, God is not at war with mankind; He is at peace.

This Jesus God raises.

The good news does not stop at this point, for if Jesus had remained in the grave, there would have been no conciliation. After all, every human dies and goes into the grave. However, Jesus did not remain in the grave, i.e., remain dead. After three days, God resurrected Him from among the dead as the first man to ever overcome death and the grave! He conquered death, never to be subjected to it again. It has no power over Him. Jesus' resurrection is proof that His death was acceptable to God.

After the death and resurrection of Jesus, Peter declared what he and others had witnessed.

“Men! Brethren! Allow me to say to you with boldness concerning the patriarch David, that he deceases also and was entombed, and his tomb is among us until this day. Being, then, inherently, a prophet, and having perceived that God swears to him with an oath, out of the fruit of his loin to seat One on his throne, perceiving this before, he speaks concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that He was neither forsaken in the unseen, nor was His flesh acquainted with decay. This Jesus God raises, of Whom we all are witnesses.” (Acts 2.29-32 cv)

Jesus is the Christ, which means the “Anointed,” and which declares Him to be the Son of the living God.

If Christ was not roused (raised) from among the dead, then *conciliation* is a hoax, the salvation of mankind is impossible, death is an eternal tomb and mankind has no hope. As Paul, the apostle for the nations (gentiles), declared: “*Now, if Christ has not been roused, vain is your faith—you are still in your sins!*” (1 Corinthians 15.17 cv).

The good news is that He was roused (raised) from among the dead and many were witnesses of this fact. However, not only was He roused from among the dead, but He also ascended back to God in heaven.

He [the Son of God] who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things. (Ephesians 4.10 NASB)

Christ is now seated in heaven at the right hand of God the Father.

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Saved by grace through faith.

Mankind has been conciliated to God through Christ, but how does the individual come into the benefit of the conciliation of God, that is, come into the place of knowing this peace? The sinner must be saved by grace through faith. *Grace* can mean “to bestow a benefit on one who deserves judgment.” Christ took the judgment we all deserve when He died on the cross for each one of us. Now, all we must do is believe God. It is very simple. There is no work for anyone to do. There is absolutely nothing anyone can do, except simply believe that...

Christ died for our sins [the sin of the whole world; past, present and future] according to the Scriptures, and that **He was buried**, and that He was **raised on the third day** according to the Scriptures, and that **He appeared** to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time [witnessed by many as proof that the grave could not hold Him, after which He ascended back to heaven].... (1 Corinthians 15.3-6 NASB [added by writer])

The good news is that although He was buried, He was raised from among the dead after three days. Jesus being raised from among the dead means that His death for all mankind was acceptable to God.

Believing in Jesus means believing in what He did for us sinners and putting our trust in this work that He did, trusting Him.

What did He do? He died for *all* (past, present and future) our sins. He took our place as a sinner and the judgment of God fell upon Him as if He were the sinner, although He never sinned. He laid down His life and shed His blood on a cross for all mankind! He became our righteousness before God. Once saved, we will never face the wrath of God.

Our salvation is guaranteed by the fact that God raised His Son from among the dead. All anyone must do is agree with God! The word is: **Believe, and you shall be saved!** Put your trust in the One who died for you! It is God's gift to you.

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. (Ephesians 2.8-9 NASB)

Jesus, the Son of God.

Before moving on to more of the good news, it is important to make sure that we truly know who Jesus is, for many false teachings have gone forth regarding Jesus. Let us be clear that Jesus is the Son of God who is the visible image of the invisible God.

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If mankind wants to *see* God, they must see *God's Son*. If mankind wants to *know* God, they must know *God's Son*. If mankind wants to be *saved* from death, they must see that Christ is *the Way*, the only way. If mankind wants to be *justified* before God, they must accept the One who is *Just*. If mankind wants to be *reconciled* to God, they must see that peace has been made through *the blood of His cross*. If mankind wants *life*, they must see that Christ is *the Life*.

Jesus was not just a good man who somehow managed to live a good life. Many religions of the world accept Jesus as a good man, a philosopher, a prophet, a teacher, a moralist and many other things, but they deny that He is the Son of God. Others believe He is the Son of God, but that He was never Man and He never died. He only took on a body and faked being a man. They say that He shed His body when He ascended. Others believe that Jesus was born a man, but not as God's Son, and somehow He attained to godliness and sonship to become a god and God's Son. Some believe that Jesus' body is still in the grave, that He was never resurrected. All these thoughts are *false* and all who hold these views are *deceived*.

Jesus was born of a virgin and His name was *Immanuel*, which translated means, "*God with us*" (Matthew 1.23). The Holy Spirit came upon Mary and the power of the Most High over-shadowed her.

Jesus declared that as the Son of God, He came forth from God the Father, who sent Him to this earth. He had a glory with the Father before the world was. He was one with the Father (John 10.30; 17.5, 8, 18, 22). Jesus declared that He existed before Abraham was born about 2,000 years earlier (John 8.58).

He is the Creator of mankind who took on the form of His creation, becoming the Second Man, the last Adam (John 1.3; 1 Corinthians 15.45-47; Hebrews 1.2). He is the exact image and representation of the invisible God (Colossians 1.15; Hebrews 1.3). He is the Word of God and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God (John 1.1-2 NASB).

There was the true light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him (John 1.9-10 NASB).

The world was made through Him and He upholds or holds all things together by the word of His power (Hebrews 1.2, 3 NASB). Remove the power of the Son of God from the universe and all will disintegrate.

There is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him. (1 Corinthians 8.6 NASB)

He commanded authority over the elements, the wind, the sea, the demons, and even unclean spirits (Mark 1.23-24; 3.11; 4.41). He changed water into wine,

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which required changing the very elements of life (John 2.1-11). Only the Creator could do this!

The Jewish leaders of Jesus' day demanded His death because *He made Himself out to be the Son of God* (John 19.7). To the Jewish people, one claiming to be *the Son of God* was making himself equal with God. They persecuted Jesus because He did many things on the Sabbath, including healing the sick. But He answered them, "My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working." For this cause therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, *making Himself equal with God* (John 5.17-18).

Jesus traveled from city to city, healing many and pardoning their sins. The question rang out: "*Who is able to pardon sins except God only?*" (Luke 5.21 cv).

Jesus' followers knew Him to be the Son of God. Peter declared to Jesus: "*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God*" (Matthew 16.16 cv).

The Son of God gave His life by dying on a cross to save all mankind. For this reason, *we rely on the living God, Who is the Savior of all mankind, especially of believers* (1 Timothy 4.10 cv).

Do you know the Son of God?

The work is finished!

To know the Son what is a person to do? Simply believe what God says and give Him all the praise, honor and glory. Do not add anything to it or take anything away from it. No one can earn this place before God, for *Another* has earned it for all mankind.

When Jesus died on the Cross of Calvary, He cried out, "*It is finished!*" What did He mean? What was finished? Jesus finished the work demanded by God to conciliate *all things* to Himself and to save mankind. Sin demanded the wrath or indignation of God; however, there was only one remedy or work that was acceptable to God. In fact, there was one work that was demanded, and that was the death and shed blood of a perfect, sinless man. Jesus, as the Son of God, was that perfect Man, and He did all that was required for mankind and to meet God's righteous demand.

He did *ALL* the work. There is nothing that a sinner can do to be saved; and once saved, nothing can be done to cause one to lose salvation. Salvation is the gift of God, a gift purchased exclusively for mankind with God's own blood. What love! The sinner simply must believe what God has done, putting his trust in the finished work of Christ—His death, burial, resurrection and ascension.

To some people, this sounds too good to be true; but it is true. It is all about

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grace, which can be defined as “the enabling power of God apart from human merit.” No one deserves to be saved, but God in His mercy has made the way. It is by grace; and by His grace, God even gives the faith. He has enabled man to be saved by the work of *Another*, His Son. It is not on the basis of man’s works, otherwise grace is no longer grace.

Now if it is in grace, it is no longer out of works, else the grace is coming to be no longer grace. (Romans 11.6 *cv*)

Only Jesus and His work can save mankind! It is by grace!

Here is the really good news: Once one is saved, one is forever saved. There are good works to be done after one is saved, but they have absolutely nothing to do with salvation.

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2.10 *NASB*)

Many preachers tell people they must do something to get saved. For example, they must repent; they must make Jesus Lord of their lives; they must change the course of their life; they must open the door of their heart and ask Jesus into their heart; they must confess with their mouth Jesus as Lord. These things have great value after one is saved but not in getting one saved. By the way, joining a church and sitting in a pew or on benches every week *cannot* and will *not* save anyone! Working up a sweat and a dust storm every Sunday dancing and singing along with others *cannot* and will *not* save anyone!

We are saved by grace through faith. What are sinners to do to be saved? Simply, believe; put their trust in Christ and His finished work. Let their boast be in Him.

He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Corinthians 5.21 *NASB*)

But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, that, just as it is written, “Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 1.30-31 *NASB*)

Just as there is no work on our part to be saved, there is no work on our part to remain saved. Many people make the big mistake of thinking that they must do something to remain saved. But think about it; if there is no work required to be saved but work to be done to remain saved, then salvation is not by grace.

Believers would live in constant fear of failing, never knowing whether or not they are truly saved. What a horrible existence this would be! It would be bondage of the worst kind. Fear not!

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We cannot save ourselves no matter what we do, no matter how hard we try, no matter how many good works we do. We cannot lose our salvation no matter what we do, no matter how little we try, no matter how many bad works we do, no matter how much failure we might have in our life. Of course, our life should be one of holiness and godliness, walking before God in the spirit; and this is possible because God gives us His spirit by which to live (Romans 5.5; 8.9, 11; Galatians 5.25; Ephesians 1.13).

As I see it, the one thing that is at stake after we are saved is which resurrection we will be in, the first or the second, and what rewards we will receive in the kingdom of Christ.

Only the Son of God can save us, and only He can keep us saved. The word of the conciliation declares: Believe; put your trust in the One who did all the work for your salvation by dying on the cross for you, and you shall be saved and remain saved.

For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. **But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.** (Romans 5.6-8 NASB)

For if, being enemies, we were conciliated to God through the death of His Son, much rather, being conciliated, we shall be saved in His life. Yet not only so, but we are glorying also in God, through our Lord, Jesus Christ, through Whom we now obtained the conciliation. (Romans 5.10-11 cv)

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).... (Ephesians 2.4-5 NASB)

Conciliation and salvation are about love, the love of God for mankind. Thus, God, who is love, loves *and keeps loving* the world of sinners because He gave His Son for the world! God calls mankind into a love relationship with Him. Once we believe, the door is wide open to commune with God, to come into the depths of His love for *us*, to know Him and to be at peace with Him. Today, He is not an angry God, no matter how difficult life might appear.

God is love, and His love is expressed in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Roused because of our justification—“Not Guilty!”

Christ's finished work resulted not only in *conciliation* but also in *justification*. The word *justify* means “to constitute or make one righteous.” This implies something far greater than forgiveness or pardon of sins and offenses, for these

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words imply that the guilt remains. However, to be justified means that one is not guilty of the sins and offenses. In fact, one who is justified is pronounced *not* guilty, just as if he had *never* committed one sin or offense against God or mankind.

Now it was not written because of him only, that it is reckoned to him, but because of us also, to whom it is about to be reckoned, who are believing on Him Who rouses Jesus our Lord from among the dead, Who was given up because of our offenses, and **was roused because of our justifying.**
(Romans 4.23-25 cv)

How is this possible? From God's view, when Christ died, we died. Simply, when Christ died, all mankind went into the grave with Him. He took all our sins and offenses into death and there they remain. Our old humanity was crucified together with Him that the body of sin may be nullified. In other words, mankind died with Christ that all might live through Christ's life.

Now if **we died together with Christ, we believe that we shall be living together with Him also**, having perceived that Christ, being roused from among the dead, is no longer dying. Death is lording it over Him no longer, for in that He died, He died to Sin once for all time, yet in that He is living, He is living to God. **Thus you also, be reckoning yourselves to be dead, indeed, to Sin, yet living to God in Christ Jesus, our Lord.** (Romans 6.8-11 cv)

So then as through one transgression [Adam's sin] there resulted condemnation to all men ["guilty," death], even so through one act of righteousness [Christ's death] there resulted **justification of life to all men**. For as through the one man's [Adam's] disobedience the many [all mankind] were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One [Christ] the many [all mankind] will be made righteous ["not guilty," life].
(Romans 5.18-19 NASB [added by writer])

Do you grasp the greatness of what God's Son accomplished through His death on the cross? The blood of His cross not only conciliated mankind to God, but Christ being roused from among the dead also resulted in mankind's justification. Christ was roused for our justifying. In other words, mankind's sins were left in the grave and when Christ was roused, God, the Judge of all, declared mankind "not guilty." The penalty for sin was paid for in full, and it was erased or blotted out completely through the death, burial, and resurrection of the Son of God.

Many sinners are told that they must ask God to forgive them in order to be saved. But how can a sinner ask to be forgiven if God has already removed the sin and the just penalty of sin in His Son's death? Asking for forgiveness to be saved is denying the very meaning of Christ's death. Simply believe what Christ has done for all mankind, and that includes each and every one of us. He is the Savior of all mankind! He has saved all mankind and each of us who believe is called to

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believe and enter into the joy of knowing that God has removed the guilty sentence and has declared us justified in His sight, as if we never committed a sin. However, do *not* take this to mean that once we are saved, we are to persist in sin. Never!

What, then, shall we declare? **That we may be persisting in sin that grace should be increasing? May it not be coming to that!** We, who died to sin, how shall we still be living in it? Or are you ignorant that whoever are baptized [referring to Christ's death, not water baptism] into Christ Jesus, are baptized into His death? We, then, were entombed together with Him through baptism into death, that, even as Christ was roused from among the dead through the glory of the Father, thus we also should be walking in newness of life. (Romans 6.1-4 cv)

Yet where sin increases, grace superexceeds, that, even as Sin reigns in death, thus Grace also should be reigning through righteousness, for life eonian [life in the eons to come], through Jesus Christ, our Lord. (Romans 5.20-21 cv)

We are commanded to put off the old humanity with its bad behavior and put on the new humanity which, in accord with God, is being created in righteousness and holiness of the truth (Ephesians 4.22-24).

Be conciliated.

All that has been presented so far speaks of God's action to remove all the barriers between Himself and mankind. It is all God's doing. All we must do is believe what God has done for us. However, there is one more important matter that needs to be stressed. God is at peace with us; however, He desires us to be at peace with Him.

Paul, the apostle of Christ, wrote: ***"We are beseeching for Christ's sake, "Be conciliated to God!"***" (2 Corinthians 5.20 cv).

God has conciliated all mankind to Himself through His Son, but each one of us, individually, must be conciliated to God. Conciliation requires that both parties be in agreement or harmony, and when they are, they are mutually *reconciled*. In other words, we need to respond to God's grace and love, and be at peace with God.

Being, then, justified by faith, we may be having peace toward God, through our Lord, Jesus Christ, through Whom we have the access also, by faith, into this grace in which we stand, and we may be glorying in expectation of the glory of God. (Romans 5.1-2 cv)

Peace is a state of quietness, tranquility, without disturbance or agitation. We are to be in a place of rest in God, through the Lord Jesus Christ, knowing that He

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loves us, that we can commune with Him in the spirit, that His grace will guide us through each day, and that one day we will come into the glory of God.

God is not satisfied with merely saving us and acquitting us of our sins. He desires our love and adoration. Reconciliation urges us into full and affectionate fellowship with Him and His Son. One day, all mankind will come into this glorious place; but the call today is to believe and be reconciled. Do not delay; enter into the joy of your Lord.

Through Him [God's Son], to **reconciled all** [all mankind] to Him (making peace through the blood of His cross), through Him [His Son], whether those on the earth or those in the heavens. (Colossians 1.20 cv)

A new creation in Christ.

Believers in the finished work of Christ are a new creation *in* Christ, who is the Head of an entirely new creation. Believers no longer belong to Adam's race. When Christ died on the cross, He took us with Him so that when He died, our old humanity in Adam died with Him. Further, the new creation is identified with the new heaven and the new earth of the last eon, *God's day*, when all is new. See Revelation 21.5.

So that, if anyone is in Christ, there is **a new creation**: the primitive passed by. Lo! there has come new! (2 Corinthians 5.17 cv)

You have died and **your life is hidden with Christ in God**. (Colossians 3.3 NASB)

For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly **we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection**, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin, once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. (Romans 6.5-11 NASB)

It is no longer our life but Christ's life. Our whole life is to be dependent on the One who died for us. As Paul wrote: *I am crucified with Christ, and no longer live, I, but Christ lives in me; but in that I now live in flesh, I live by faith, the faith of the Son of God, who has loved me and given himself for me* (Galatians 2.20 DNT).

Crucified with Christ is *the word* (message) *of the cross* that is foolishness to the world but the power of God to those who are being saved (1 Corinthians 1.18-25).

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The cross divides humanity, separating the old in Adam from the new in Christ. The cross wipes out all that was of the old humanity, for it was crucified with Christ. He took it into the grave and there it must remain. A new humanity has come forth, based on *the word of the cross* that has applied the cross to the old humanity, which has been crucified and rendered dead.

The body of Christ, the ecclesia.

Today, what is the new creation in Christ? It is the body of Christ. All who believe have been joined to Christ in the most intimate way. They are His body and He is their Head, and it is His body that is seated together among the *celestials* in Christ with every spiritual blessing among the celestials. There is nothing greater than being the body of Christ.

God's conciliation starts with the body of Christ, for this is where God first manifests His peace with mankind. He begins with the body.

The nations are to be joint enjoyers of an allotment, and **a joint body**, and joint partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus, through the evangel. (Ephesians 3.6 cv)

For **He is our Peace**, Who makes both one [believing Jew and gentile], and razes the central wall of the barrier (the enmity in His flesh), nullifying the law of precepts in decrees, that He should be creating the two, in Himself, into one new humanity, **making peace**; and should be reconciling both in **one body** to God through the cross, killing the enmity in it. And, coming, He brings the evangel of peace to you, those afar, and peace to those near, for through Him we both have had access, in one spirit, to the Father. (Ephesians 2.14-18 cv)

Because God has first manifested His peace through the body of Christ, the believers are to *let the peace of Christ rule in their hearts, to which indeed they were called in one body; to be thankful* (Colossians 3.15), and to be reconciled to one another. This is mutual reconciliation!

The body of Christ is also *the ecclesia* (church, assembly), the called-out ones, called out of the world as a *celestial* people. *Christ is head over all things to the ecclesia, which is His body* (Ephesians 1.22-23). *Christ is Head of the ecclesia, and He is the Saviour of the body* (Ephesians 5.23). *And He is the Head of the body, the ecclesia, Who is Sovereign, Firstborn from among the dead, that in all He may be becoming first* (Colossians 1.18). The *ecclesia*, or what many call the *church*, is not a building or an institution but a people who are intimately joined to Christ.

The resurrection and the snatching away.

There is more. The believer's physical body is not exempt from decay and

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ultimately death. But death to a believer is like sleep. In fact, a believer falls asleep in Jesus; and one day all believers will be awakened at the same time and they, just like their Savior, will be resurrected from among the dead and snatched away, being transformed into conformity with the body of His glory, in the image of the Celestial One. ¹

To illustrate, when we go to sleep at night and we are sleeping soundly, we are unaware of our surroundings. We are simply unaware of all that is around us and that is going on in the world. Our body slows down and our soul is not aware of anything. It is asleep. When we wake in the morning, we are greeted by the sun. Falling asleep in Jesus is similar to this. Believers will awaken as if they had just gone to sleep a short time ago, even though it might have been as long as 2,000 years, and they will be greeted by the Son (Sun) of God, the Light of the world.

At physical death, a believer does *not* immediately go to heaven, as many believe, for the Bible declares that we *wait for His Son from heaven, whom He [God] raised from the dead* (1 Thessalonians 1.10 NASB).

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also **we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory**, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself. (Philippians 3.20-21 NASB)

(Yet now Christ has been roused from among the dead, the Firstfruit of those who are reposing. For since, in fact, through a man came death, through a Man, also, comes the resurrection of the dead. For even as, in Adam, all are dying, thus also, **in Christ, shall all be vivified. Yet each in his own class**: the Firstfruit, Christ; thereupon those who are Christ's in His presence; thereafter the consummation, whenever He may be giving up the kingdom to His God and Father, whenever He should be nullifying all sovereignty and all authority and power. (1 Corinthians 15.20-24 cv)

Paul was given a revelation by the risen Lord Jesus Himself.

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about **those who are asleep**, that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, and remain until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede **those who have fallen asleep**. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to

¹ Those who die not believing in Jesus remain dead in the grave, waiting for the second resurrection and the great white throne judgment that will occur about 1,000 years later. They will face a second death but ultimately will be reconciled at the consummation of God's day.

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meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words. (1 Thessalonians 4.13-18 NASB)

This is a description of *the resurrection* and *the snatching away* of the believers. By the word of the Lord to Paul, those who belong to Christ, the saints, will one day be caught up into the air to meet the Lord. In these verses, Paul gave no indication of what transpires other than the resurrection and being snatched away. In another letter to believers, he proclaimed a secret.

Lo! a secret to you am I telling! We all, indeed, shall not be put to repose, yet we all shall be changed, in an instant, in the twinkle of an eye, at the last trump. For He will be trumpeting, and the dead will be roused incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For **this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal put on immortality.** Now, whenever this corruptible should be putting on incorruption and this mortal should be putting on immortality, then shall come to pass the word which is written, Swallowed up was Death by Victory. Where, O Death, is your victory? Where, O Death, is your sting? Now the sting of Death is sin, yet the power of sin is the law. Now thanks be to God, Who is giving us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 15.51-57 cv)

With the snatching away, all who belong to Christ will be changed. Death will be swallowed up, and the believer will take on a *celestial* (heavenly), *spiritual* body that no longer is subject to death. The perishable or corrupt will put on the imperishable or incorruption. Mortality will put on immortality. Christ will transform the body of the believer's humble state into conformity with the body of His glory. They will be like Him.

The first man was out of the earth, soilish; **the second Man is the Lord out of heaven.** Such as the soilish one is, such are those also who are soilish, and such as the Celestial One, such are those also who are celestials. **And according as we wear the image of the soilish, we should be wearing the image also of the Celestial.** (1 Corinthians 15.47-49 cv)

Today, our physical body is sown a perishable, mortal body that is restricted to this earth. Apart from wearing a space suit, man's body is not capable of living in the *celestial* realm. It is impossible, for our blood needs the oxygen from the earth's atmosphere and the food provided from the soil. The *celestial* body must be constituted for an entirely different environment.

Man's body has been sown in dishonor, but a believer's body will be raised in glory. In other words, the *celestial* body will be a body of *glory* that is capable of living unhindered in the *celestial* realm, in fact, living unhindered throughout God's entire universe, including on the earth. It is sown in *weakness* and *infirmity*; it is raised in *power*. It is sown a *soulish* body; it is raised a *spiritual* body (1 Corinthians 15.42-44).

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Think about the tremendous enormity of being reconciled to God. The *celestial* body will never experience pain, pestilence, famine, and death. The soul will never be anxious, depressed, or doubtful again. The life of the *celestial* body will be a perfect spiritual life, for it is a *spiritual* body, energized and governed by the spirit and no longer governed by the soul.

Today, believers suffer along with all mankind, for all face death; but believers are kept by the power of God, even in these mortal bodies, for a glory to be revealed when Christ comes to rescue His body.

Wherefore we are not despondent, but even if our outward man is decaying, nevertheless that within us is being renewed day by day. For the momentary lightness of our affliction is producing for us **a transcendently transcendent** [surpassing, excelling, extraordinary, supernatural] **eonian burden of glory**.... (2 Corinthians 4.16-17 cv)

Oh, may the eyes of our heart be enlightened to see this great destiny for all who are reconciled to God in this day.

The eons.

To understand the resurrection more fully, it is helpful to know that God's purpose and plan is being worked out in periods of time called *eons* or *ages*. There were two eons before the one in which we live today, and Scripture reveals two eons to come, which progress toward the consummation of God's purpose and plan that He set before the disruption of the world (Genesis 1.2). Through the eons, God works *all things* according to *the counsel of His will* (Ephesians 1.11).

We live in what is called the wicked or evil eon in which man rules over man, administering his affairs apart from God. We could say without contradiction that the governments of our sinful world do not administer perfect righteousness and justice. This is *the day of Man*. The next eon is called *the day of the Lord*. Man will no longer rule supreme, for all rule will be given to Christ, the Son of Mankind, who will be crowned *the King of kings and the Lord of lords*. He will rule over the affairs of this earth with a rod of iron in righteousness and justice.

According to God's purpose and plan, 6,000 years or six 1,000-year days must be completed before the commencement of the millennial kingdom of Christ, which means this aspect of the kingdom will last for 1,000 years, the seventh 1,000-year day in the history of our current heaven and earth. God has set six days for man, followed by a seventh day or Sabbath rest in which God's King will rule with a rod of iron over the governments of this earth. We see this pattern set in the beginning of the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) when God first restored this ruined earth in six days and rested on the seventh day (Genesis 1.2-2.4).

Following the seventh day is the last eon called *the day of God*, which we could call the eighth day and will last at least 1,000 years and probably much longer, for

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with God one day is like 1,000 years, and 1,000 years like one day (2 Peter 3.8). Then, the Son of God will rule from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the new Jerusalem, the dwelling of God in spirit (Ephesians 2.22), which comes down out of heaven when the old heaven and earth pass away and *all things* are new (Revelation 20.11; 21.1-2).

Through the coming eons, God's glory will shine forth in greater splendor until, finally, at the end of the eighth day, *all things*, including *all* mankind that suffered the second death (Revelation 20.14), will be fully and completely reconciled to God that He may be *all in all*.

Heading up all.

During the next two eons, believers will be glorified with *celestial, spiritual* bodies and will be with the Lord in the *celestial* and *physical* realm, no longer subject to death. Now, one might wonder what the believer will be doing. However, the proper question is, what will Christ be doing?

The next eon is when the kingdom of this world becomes the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ (Revelation 11.15). This eon begins when Christ returns to this earth after being gone a long time to receive a kingdom. Christ's rule has one purpose, and it is to progressively sum up or head up or gather up *all* in Himself that God may be *All in all*. Christ will begin to subdue the heart of every enemy of God during the next two eons until, finally, death itself will be abolished.

For even as, in Adam, all are dying, thus also, in Christ, shall all be vivified. Yet each in his own class: the Firstfruit, Christ; thereupon those who are Christ's in His presence; thereafter the consummation, whenever He may be giving up the kingdom to His God and Father, whenever **He should be nullifying all sovereignty and all authority and power**. For He must be reigning until He should be placing all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy is being abolished: death. For He subjects all under His feet. Now whenever He may be saying that all is subject, it is evident that it is outside of Him Who subjects all to Him. Now, whenever all may be subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also shall be subjected to Him Who subjects all to Him, **that God may be All in all.** (1 Corinthians 15.22-28 cv)

The objective of Christ's rule is to head up *all things*, to reconcile *all things* to God so that God may be *All in all*. The next eon will not be an absolutely perfect time on earth, but it will be a continual increase of paradise as Christ begins to aggressively head up *all things*. The heading up will continue into the following eon when *all things* are new, until finally, at the consummation of *the day of God*, there no longer will be the need for the government of nations, for God will fill everything in His entire creation. He will be *in all* and He will *fill all*.

Paul was the one who was given revelation of this great fact, which he called a

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secret (that is now revealed).

In all wisdom and prudence making known to us the secret of His will (in accord with His delight, which He purposed in Him) to have an administration of the complement of the eras, **to head up all in the Christ**—both that in the heavens and that on the earth.... (Ephesians 1.8b-10 cv)

Paul included both things in the heavens and things upon the earth in this heading up. Now, let us add a few other verses to this one. In referring to this eon and the eon to come, Paul declared more of the secret.

[God] subjects all under His feet, and gives Him, as **Head over all, to the ecclesia which is His body, the complement** [filling up, completion] **of the One completing the all in all.** (Ephesians 1.22-23 cv)

[God] rouses [raises] us together [the ecclesia, the body of Christ] and seats us **together among the celestials** [in the heavenly places], in Christ Jesus, that, **in the oncoming eons** [ages], He should be displaying the transcendent [surpassing] riches of His grace in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2.6-7 cv)

To me [Paul], less than the least of all saints, was granted this grace: to bring the evangel of the untraceable riches of Christ to the nations [gentiles], and to enlighten all as to what is the administration of the secret, which has been concealed from the eons [ages] in God, Who creates all, that now may be made known to the sovereignties and **the authorities among the celestials, through the ecclesia**, the multifarious wisdom of God, in accord with the purpose of the eons [ages], which He makes in Christ Jesus, our Lord.... (Ephesians 3.8-11 cv)

All these verses mean that, in God's wisdom, the body of Christ has been chosen to be a co-worker with Christ in the heading up of *all*, especially the heading up of all in the heavens. Can you imagine a calling any greater than this? It is tremendous! Those who are reconciled to God in this eon, the body of Christ, will enter the *celestial* realm (physical as well) during the next eon to work alongside Christ as He heads up ***all things in heaven and on earth***. The body of Christ is the first to be headed up in Christ and will participate with Christ during the two oncoming eons in bringing *all* into subjection so that God will be *All in all*.

The body of Christ is on the leading edge of what God has begun to do in and through His Son. Spiritually speaking, believers are now seated among the *celestials*, but a day is coming when this great fact will be literally manifested for all the *celestial* creation to behold. Christ is coming again to receive His body to Himself to reign with Him over the *celestial* realm and the world. There is no higher calling, no greater honor than to be a new creation in Christ and to be included in the great work He is doing and will continue to do for the next two

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eons until He has reconciled *All* to God. Today, Christ is to be all until, finally, God Himself will be *All in all*.

Christ's death on the cross is an absolute, unfailing, glorious success!

The time is coming when death will be no more and *all* mankind will be saved, justified and reconciled, and brought into endless life.

“For God locks up all together in stubbornness, that He should be merciful to all” (Romans 11.32 cv). **Salvation to all!**

“Our Savior, God, Who wills that all mankind be saved and come into a realization of the truth” (1 Timothy 2.3-4 cv). **Salvation to all!**

“We rely on the living God, Who is the Savior of all mankind” (1 Timothy 4.10 cv). **Salvation to all!**

“Through one offense for all mankind for condemnation, thus also ... through one just award for all mankind for life's justifying” (Romans 5.18 cv). **Justification to all!**

“Through Him to reconcile all to Him (making peace through the blood of His cross)” (Colossians 1.20 cv). **Reconciliation to all!**

“For even as, in Adam, all are dying, thus also, in Christ, shall all be vivified [made alive]” (1 Corinthians 15.22 cv). **Life to all!**

At the consummation of all, *all things* will be truly reconciled to God. All this will be worked out during the next two eons, until finally, *all* is headed up, and then endless glory will begin.

CHRIST is coming again!

God has raised Christ from among the dead, He has ascended into heaven, and He is coming back to this earth very soon for all to see!

And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was departing, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them; and they also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? **This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.**” (Acts 1.10-11 NASB)

It is time: “*Be conciliated to God!*” Be at peace with God, and then give Him all the praise, honor and glory. It is time for the body of Christ to have the word of the conciliation written on their hearts and to be ambassadors for Christ. This is in accord with the purpose of the eons.

6. THE REIGNING WITH CHRIST

We must all appear before the *dais* or *bema* of Christ to be required for our deeds in the body, whether good or bad. Interestingly, Paul has not given us much information about what the outcomes of the bema will look like. What are the rewards? We are not told. Yet, like an artist painting a great mural, Paul has painted a most glorious mural of the destiny of the ecclesia, which is the body of Christ. At times, he presented this destiny as all in the future, and at other times, he presented this destiny in the present, as if we have already entered onto this most sacred ground. And yet, at other times, the light of his evangel shines so brightly and so victoriously that it seems as if all who will appear before the bema will receive the applause of God, and none will be shut out.

Two thousand years later, this beloved apostle of the nations continues to enlighten the eyes of our heart to see our on-high calling and the glory that awaits us in Christ. Consider *some* of what Paul has revealed in his epistles: the body is seated together among the celestials, in Christ (Ephesians 2.6); the saints have been transferred into the kingdom of the Son of His love (Colossians 1.13); the children of God are enjoyers of an allotment in the kingdom (Romans 8.17); the body of Christ is the complement of Christ and, as such, will join Christ in heading up all in the heavens and on the earth (Ephesians 1.10; 22-23); the saints have the expectation of glory reserved in the heavens (Colossians 1.5); the dead in Christ and those alive in Christ on earth when He comes will be taken up in clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so they shall always be together with the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4.13-18); in the twinkle of an eye all shall be changed to put on incorruption and immortality and to enjoy an allotment in the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 15.50-57); the saints will judge the messengers (angels or celestial beings) and the world (1 Corinthians 6.2, 3).

All these things and more describe the destiny of the body of Christ because Christ is the Savior of the body, which He nurtures and cherishes that He should be presenting to Himself a glorious ecclesia (*out-called* body), not having spot or wrinkle or any such things, but that it may be holy and flawless (see Ephesians 5.22-33). Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass (1 Thessalonians 5.24 NASB). When we meditate on the glory of our destiny in Christ, it should bring forth from our innermost being love, adoration and worship of our God and Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Glory to God!

Perhaps, there is one phrase that best describes this glorious destiny, and it is *reigning with Christ*, which Paul seems to present as both a present and a future reality. But what does reigning look like? I propose that for the body of Christ, reigning with Christ is much more than sitting on literal thrones ruling over others, as if wielding great power and authority. This concept is appropriate on earth as man rules over man, but it seems to fall short of the glory for a people joined to the Head of the universe as His body.

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Reigning has to do with the very life, love and character of Christ being manifested throughout the heavens and on the earth through the ecclesia, which is His body made up of many members, until Christ is all in all. I propose that the concept of the body is an important key to understanding what it means to reign with Christ, as well as what the rewards are that will come forth from the bema of Christ. Christ will sit on His throne and so will His body. His promise to those who conquer is to sit down with Him on His throne as He conquered and sat down on His Father's throne (Revelation 3.21).

Now, to begin, let us look at the word *reign*.

Reign—“be-king.”

The word *reign* means “be-king.” Based on this meaning, most people probably envision a king seated on a throne. However, *reign* also can mean “to hold sway, to prevail or to predominate.” Another word that is applicable to the word *reign* is the word *ascendancy*, which means “to be in domination.” The word *ascend* means “to move from a lower position to a higher position, such as in rank.” The word *domination* should immediately bring to mind when Elohim created man and gave him *dominion* over the earth (Genesis 1.26).

We see this thought very clearly in Paul's epistle to the Romans where the word *reign* is used in relation to death [death reigned from Adam unto Moses (Romans 5.14)], to sin [sin reigns in death (Romans 5.12)], to grace [grace reigns through righteousness (Romans 5.21)], and to life [grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through Christ (Romans 5.17)]. We could say that death was king from Adam to Moses; sin is king in death; grace is king through righteousness; and grace and the gift of righteousness will be king in life through Christ. Each is in the ascendancy in its respective sphere. These are not literal kings; rather they are in the ascendancy, which refers to rising to a high level, as in rank or a superior or dominating position.

As we read his epistles, it as if we can hear Paul calling out “be-king,” “be in the ascendancy in life, for you will be in the ascendancy in the eons to come.” We must agree that reigning in life for the believer is both present and future. For example, in grace through Christ, we have every provision to live in the ascendancy over sin and the flesh. Paul alluded to this as he dealt with the many problems that existed among the saints in Corinth.

Already are ye filled, already ye are become rich, ye have come to **reign** without us: yea and I would that ye did **reign**, that we also might **reign** with you. (1 Corinthians 4.8 ASV)

Some translations insert the words *reigned as kings* [KJV] or *ascended your thrones* [WNT] in place of the word *reign*, but they all acknowledge that the words *kings* and *thrones* are not in the Greek manuscripts; that is, the translators added them. This is unfortunate, for it is adding interpretative bias to God's word.

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Given the wording, it is apparent that Paul was not making reference to a future reign, as if they would be kings on thrones. How could they come to reign without Paul and his companions unless Paul was referring to a present reign, such as reigning in life? They were boasting as if they were already reigning in life, as if they had ascended over the things of the flesh, and yet their actions and words were quite the contrary. They were boasting in the wrong things, and they had parted Christ and become sectarian. They had all the spiritual gifts, and yet they were fleshly, minors in Christ; that is, they were not spiritual (see 1 Corinthians 3.1-4). The flesh still dominated them; therefore, they were not in the place of ascendancy over the flesh.

Paul was making a point with the Corinthians and in no way meant that they were in fact reigning in the good sense of the word. He desired that they would reign in life with him and his companions, but to do this they had to grow up to be spiritual, which meant putting off the old fleshly ways. Isn't it interesting that they were not deficient in any graces (gifts), yet they were fleshly? The lesson is that graces alone will not make one spiritual.

So in these few verses, we see that reigning refers to something other than a king sitting on a throne, and that it can have a present application.

Enduring to be reigning together.

Curiously, Paul never used the phrase *reigning with Christ* or *reigning with Him*. Actually, there is only one reference to *reigning with Him* (Christ), and it is used exclusively for the conquerors (overcomers) that will reign with Christ for 1,000 years. However, Paul did use the expression *reigning together*,¹ which, according to the context of its use, is similar to *reigning with Him*.

Therefore I am enduring all because of those who are chosen, that they also may be happening upon the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with glory eonian. Faithful is the saying: "For if we died together, we shall be living together also; if we are enduring, **we shall be reigning together also**; if we are disowning, He also will be disowning us; if we are disbelieving, He is remaining faithful—He cannot disown Himself." (2 Timothy 2.10-13 cv)

Death for the saint leads to life together with Christ. Enduring in this life leads to reigning together with Christ in the future eons. If we fail and somehow disown the Lord, He will disown us. However, if we disbelieve along the way, Christ will remain faithful, for He cannot disown Himself, which means He cannot disown His own body, for He nourishes and cherishes it (Ephesians 5.29).

¹ Many translations use the phrase *reign with Him*, but they also acknowledge that the word *Him* is not in the original Greek manuscripts but was added by the editors. In these translations, it should read *reign with*. A few translations use the expression *reign together* [DNT, YLT]. One translation goes so far as declaring that *we shall share His Kingship* (WNT).

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Obviously, there are many things of great import that can be discussed in these few verses, but the discussion will be restricted to this faithful saying: *If we are enduring, we shall be reigning together also*. This is a conditional statement that requires us to endure in order to reign together. We need to take note of the words *endure, reign and together*.

Before looking at this matter of enduring to reign together, we need to consider the context of Paul's epistle, both before and after these verses. In all of his other epistles, he looked forward to continued service to the Lord, but in this letter to his beloved Timothy, Paul declared that he had finished his career, all the while keeping the faith. He had run the race of *the* faith. A wreath of righteousness awaited him in the day of his resurrection, for he loved the advent of His Lord who was saving him for His *celestial* kingdom (see 2 Timothy 4.7-18). There is no doubt that as his death neared Paul looked ahead to the day of Christ, to his resurrection from among the dead and entrance into the celestial kingdom of Christ. He was looking for Christ's advent and His kingdom (2 Timothy 4.1).

With his imminent dissolution as the backdrop, Paul left instruction to his beloved son in the faith to encourage him to continue in his service to the Lord. Paul had suffered much evil as he brought the evangel to the nations. He knew that his life would not be spared, but he also knew the greater power of God that had prevailed throughout his service and that would keep Him.

You may not be ashamed, then, of the testimony of our Lord, nor yet of me, His prisoner, but **suffer evil with the evangel in accord with the power of God**, Who saves us and calls us with a holy calling, not in accord with our acts, but in accord with His own purpose and the grace which is given to us in Christ Jesus before times eonian, yet now is being manifested through the advent of our Saviour, Christ Jesus, Who, indeed, abolishes death, yet illuminates life and incorruption through the evangel of which I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher of the nations. For which cause I am suffering these things also, but I am not ashamed, for I am aware Whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that He is able to guard what is committed to me, for that day. (2 Timothy 1.8-12 cv)

Paul suffered evil in his day, and he instructed Timothy to suffer it as well. The word of God that had been entrusted to Paul for the nations was under fire, and many were departing from it, and many were fighting against it. This did not deter Paul one iota but instead made him more determined to hold to the One in whom he believed. He was given revelation from the Lord, and no matter what others might have said or charged against him regarding this word, his answer was to hold to the word.

He instructed Timothy to have a pattern of sound words, which he had heard from Paul (2 Timothy 1.13); to commit to faithful men what he had heard from Paul through many witnesses (2 Timothy 2.2); to present himself to God, qualified, an unashamed worker, correctly cutting the word of truth (2 Timothy

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2.15); to avoid those who swerve from the truth (2 Timothy 2.16-18); to be gentle toward all, apt to teach, bearing with evil, with meekness training those who are antagonizing, seeing whether God may be giving them repentance to come into a realization of the truth (2 Timothy 2.24-25); to remain in what he had learned in the sacred Scriptures, for all Scripture is inspired by God, and is beneficial for teaching, for exposure, for correction, for discipline in righteousness, that the man of God may be equipped, fitted out for every good act (2 Timothy 3.14-17 cv); and to herald the word, to stand by it (2 Timothy 4.2).

There is no doubt that Paul had one thing in mind; it was the word that was entrusted to him and that he had entrusted to Timothy. The only answer in the day of departure is to herald the truth, which requires correctly cutting the word of truth. If we do, we can be assured of one thing; we will suffer evil at the hands of many detractors who will stand against the truth. They can have many appearances; even the appearance of being very religious and pious with knowledge of Scripture, being very learned, having a form of devoutness, yet denying its power (see 2 Timothy 3.1-7).

Dear brethren, we too are in a day of departure, perhaps even greater than in Paul's waning days. Many do not hold to the truth and Scripture is cut in many ways, but often not in the correct way. When Paul told Timothy to endure, he was telling him to endure in the word of God, the sacred Scriptures and what he had been taught by Paul, which is what we have been given in his epistles that have become part of our holy Scriptures. By extension, those who endure in the word and suffer evil must also endure through the times of evil. In other words, there is an enduring in the word and an enduring in service to the Lord. In our service to the Lord, we are called to endure and not give up.

Endure means "to under-remain," which, we could say, refers to sticking with something. We are to remain under it or to remain with it. We are to remain with the truth of the word of God; and if we do, although we might suffer evil in a day of apostasy, our endurance in holding to the word, as well as living by it, will lead to reigning together with Christ.

In the context of Paul's faithful saying, we must assume that the word *together* applies to being together with Christ. Salvation is *in* Christ, for we died with Christ, and we shall be living with Christ. In addition to dying with Him and living with Him, if we endure, we shall be reigning together also. Why? Because He is remaining faithful!

Now, although he clearly stated that those who endure will reign with Christ, Paul did not tell us what this will look like. Will the enduring believers be sitting on thrones as kings and lords, or does it mean that they will simply be in the ascendancy over all things as our Lord is? With this question, let us continue on with the matter of judging angels.

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Judge angels and the world.

Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? **Know ye not that we shall judge angels?** how much more things that pertain to this life? (1 Corinthians 6.2-3 KJV)

It is undeniable that Paul wrote that the saints will judge the angels and the world. What does this mean? The word *judge* could be taken to mean ruling over, but perhaps the better way to view it is in the sense of being above in position or rank in the kingdom of God. The writer to the Hebrews, in considering the world to come, quoted part of David's Psalm 8.

But one in a certain place testified, saying, What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visitest him? **Thou madest him a little lower than the angels;** thou crownedst him with glory and honor, and didst set him over the works of thy hands.... (Hebrews 2.6-7 KJV)

Man was made a little lower than the angels, which has to mean lower in rank or position. After all, mankind is restricted to this earth and has no ability to interact with the celestial beings, unless God allows it. After the one transgression of Adam, mankind fell even lower, for death passed through into all mankind (Romans 5.12). Angels do not die (see Luke 20.36).

In like fashion, when the Son of Mankind walked this earth, He subjected Himself to His Father as one who was lower than the angels. He willingly emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, being made in the likeness of men, and He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death (see Philippians 2.7-8). But now we see Jesus who was made for a little while lower than the angels crowned with glory and honor. He is no longer lower in rank but is far above all rule and authority and power and dominion (Ephesians 1.21), having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him (1 Peter 3.22 NASB). He is far above all! Also, death is no longer master over Him (see Romans 6.9), for indeed He abolishes death.

Consequently, just as Christ is far above all, so will His body be far above all, no longer a little lower than the messengers and no longer having death as master over them. The body of Christ will rise above the angels in position in God's kingdom and will judge them, which is not judging for condemnation but rather judging as in making determinations as in to set things right. We could say that the body will set things right with the angels. This thought is more in line with what Paul wrote the Corinthians about being ambassadors of God in heralding the word of the conciliation. *"Be conciliated to God!"* See 2 Corinthians 5.19-21.

Interestingly, Paul did not state that judging the angels or the world was a reward for faithful service. He stated it to the fleshly saints in Corinth that will be confirmed unimpeachable in the day our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1.8 cv).

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As we continue in our consideration of the word *reign*, the matter of being seated on thrones comes into view.

Seated on thrones.

Obviously, there are many references in Hebrew Scripture that refer to kings sitting on thrones. After all, the Lord sits upon a throne (Isaiah 6.1) and Christ, as King of the earth, will sit upon a throne (Matthew 25.31). In the Greek Scriptures, there are a few references to ones sitting on thrones, but without exception they are believers who conquer or overcome through the life of Christ.

John through his Patmos vision of Christ was told to write to the messengers of the seven ecclesias to encourage those who conquer during the great affliction. He later perceived thrones and ones sitting on them.

“The one who is conquering, to him will I be granting to be seated with Me on **My throne** as I, also, conquer, and am seated with My Father on **His throne.**” (Revelation 3.21 cv)

And I saw **thrones**, and some who were seated on them, to whom judgment was entrusted. (Revelation 20.4 WNT)

These thrones will be set after the King of kings and the Lord of lords (Revelation 19.16) takes the scepter of the kingdom to reign for a thousand years on the second earth and for the eons of the eons (Revelation 11.15). These, most likely, are the thrones Jesus promised to His twelve disciples.

Yet Jesus said to them, “Verily, I am saying to you, that you who follow Me, in the renascence **whenever the Son of Mankind should be seated on the throne of His glory, you also shall sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.**” (Matthew 19.28 cv)

Scripture also tells us that in the coming eon there will be a kingdom of priests that will reign on the earth; the conquerors who loved not their lives even unto death.

They shall be priests of God and of Christ, and **shall reign with him a thousand years** (Revelation 20.6 KJV)

“You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and **they will reign upon the earth.**” (Revelation 5.10 NASB)

So in these few verses, we can see the connection between being seated, thrones and reigning with Christ. As Jesus is the King of kings and Lord of lords, we can assume that these thrones do refer to kings and lords. In fact, there will be kings, lords and priests in the kingdom of Christ.

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Seated among the celestials.

Now, it is interesting that Paul, who was given revelation of the body of Christ, does not mention the body sitting on thrones but rather seated among the celestials or, according to most translations, in the heavenly places.

Yet God, being rich in mercy, because of His vast love with which He loves us (we also being dead to the offenses and the lusts), vivifies us together in Christ (in grace are you saved!) and rouses us together and **seats us together among the celestials, in Christ Jesus**, that, in the oncoming eons, He should be displaying the transcendent riches of His grace in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2.4-7 cv) ²

According to Paul's evangel, God blesses us (the body of Christ) with every spiritual blessing among the celestials, in Christ (Ephesians 1.3). In other words, all the blessings that are found among the celestials are ours in Christ. Not only does the Father bless us with every spiritual blessing among the celestials in Christ, but He also seats us together among the celestials in Christ.

This raises the question of whether this is ours in the present or is ours all in the future. Surely, Paul presented it as having a present application. It seems that Paul's vision was so clear that he looked beyond this earth and the time in which he lived; he looked into the oncoming eons and entered onto this sacred ground as if he, along with the entire body of Christ, were there. In some measure, one could say that Paul even looked outside of time and space. Just as John was caught up to the Lord's day in spirit, it was as if Paul lived continually caught up in spirit to the new creation in God's day.

Some might answer the question by stating that Paul's vision of being among the celestials was all in spirit and all in the present. Granted, there may be some element of the present for us as our eyes are enlightened to see more clearly and as we are led by the spirit. Undoubtedly, we touch upon some of the blessings. However, who of us can truly state that we are living in the realm of the celestials today, even in spirit? Are there any among us who think we are literally seated among the celestials while our bodies are firmly fixed to this earth? Obviously, we are not seated on thrones today, as if we are kings. ³ We would have to have a mighty good imagination to come to such a conclusion. Who of us can even state that we fully relate in our daily lives to what Paul saw? As we come into the place of ascendancy in our lives, we may sense that we have touched something of the

² Paul used three verbs to describe our position in Christ, and they are presented in the present tense: In God's vast love by which He saves us in grace, He *vivifies* us together, *rouses* us together and *seats* us together among the celestials. According to the concordant method, *vivifies* refers to making alive, especially the spirit; *rouses* refers to bringing forth the soul from death; *seats* refers to ascending to be with the Lord in His exalted position among the celestials.

³ Paul presented being seated among the celestials as something for all the body of Christ. He did not bring it onto the ground of reward for faithful service; rather, he presented it as a reality for all the body.

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celestials. But, the fact of the matter is that we are not there yet. At best, we can only taste it in some small measure. We need spiritual, glorified, celestial bodies that come about through the out-resurrection.

The other way to view Paul's vision is in light of his great positional statement of being *in Christ*. Believers are *in Christ*, forever secure *in Christ*, who is our Life. Where Christ is, we are. Our life is hidden with Christ in God (Colossians 3.3). When He died, we died in Him. When He was raised, we were raised in Him so that we might walk in newness of life (see Romans 6). We do not see all this in our day, but we hold to it by faith.

Simply, as the body of Christ, we have ascended to the superior position among the celestials. However, we must wait for the Savior to come from heaven to deliver us to His celestial kingdom, at which time we will enter into our destiny *in Christ*.

Can you imagine anything more glorious and sacred? Seated among the celestials in Christ means that Christ's ecclesia (*out-called* body) has entered onto the sacred ground of the finished work of Christ in a way that mankind has never known and that reveals to the sovereignties and authorities among the celestials (i.e., angels or messengers) the multifarious (manifold) wisdom of God, in accord with the purpose of the eons (see Ephesians 3.10-11).

Now, this leads to the heart of the matter. I have proposed that reigning with Christ is far greater than sitting on a throne with underlings doing our bidding or, for that matter, even judging angels and the world. As I have considered this matter, I have concluded that *another* way to consider the whole matter of reigning with Christ is to see it as more a quality of life, and this quality is intimately related to being members of Christ's body.

Eonian life.

Consider Paul's exhortation to Timothy to get hold of *eonian life* (1 Timothy 6.12 cv) or to get hold of life really (1 Timothy 6.19 cv). *Eonian life* is not only the life that reigns in life while in our body of humiliation, but the life that will reign with Christ among the celestials in the eons to come. Even this life in the eons must be seen as more than a position of ruling in the kingdom of God. What is the quality of eonian life? It is the life of Christ. It is life really! After all, we are called to be the complement of Christ. Surely, being His complement is reigning with Christ. But we cannot stop at this point because being His complement is not an individual matter but a body matter, that is, it relates to the entire body of Christ, all the members united as one. Consequently, reigning with Christ has to do with the very life, love, and character of Christ being manifested throughout the heavens and on the earth through the ecclesia, which is His body made up of many members, until Christ is all in all. I believe this is the key to understanding what it means for us to reign with Christ.

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If we want to understand reigning with Christ, we need to understand the nature of the body, both individual and corporate.

The individual body.

First, there is the individual body, namely, our human body. Paul referred to our earthly tents or homes as bodies of death (Romans 7.24) and the body of our humiliation (Philippians 3.21). Death passed through into all mankind; consequently, the bodies occupied by mankind, whether a believer or unbeliever, are bodies of corruption destined to die. However, the good news for us who believe is that a day will come when, in the resurrection of the just, we will put off corruption and put on incorruption; this mortal will put on immortality.

The major difference today between the believer and the unbeliever is that the believer has the resurrection life of Christ within and the unbeliever does not.

A day is coming when all believers will be changed in the twinkle of an eye as they put on spiritual bodies fully transfigured into the likeness of Christ. Today, we have His life, but we are not like Him in the fullest sense, for we continue to reside in bodies of death; this can only be remedied through resurrection, transfiguration, immortality, and glorification. We are waiting for our Savior to come out of heaven and transfigure the body of our humiliation, to conform it to the body of His glory. In that glorious day, our body will be even better than Eve's body when she was first fashioned out of Adam and before she was deceived by the serpent. The first woman was of the soil, just like Adam. Our new body will not be constituted from the soil, for it will be constituted a spiritual body in the image of the Celestial or Heavenly One (see 1 Corinthians 15.42-49). Our celestial body will be in the image of the Son of God, the Creator of all, and as such will not be limited to this earth or to the three spatial dimensions, plus time. ⁴

The corporate body.

As presented to us by Paul, there is what many call the *corporate* body of Christ, with Christ as the Head. The word *corporate* means "to make into a body"; and the body of Christ is a joining of all the individual believers into one body, which is called the body of Christ. In other words, the body of Christ is the sum total of all the individual believers. Each individual is a member of the body of Christ; all are joined with one another and united in spirit to the Head, Christ. In Christ, there is only one body but with many members.

Another way of looking at the body of Christ is to see it as an organism made up of many members, just as the human body is. All the members are joined

⁴ Today, science states that we live in a space-time dimensional universe. It is referred to as a "space-time continuum" comprised of three dimensions of space (i.e., height, width, and depth, or longitude, latitude, and elevation, or the coordinates x, y, and z), and one dimension of time. However, God and those among the celestials seem to be in another dimension not restricted by any of these dimensions or by time. We will be constituted to live in the realm of the celestials.

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together under one Head, which is Christ; and all are to function together as one body with each member having a function within the body, based on the graces given by the spirit of the Lord.

For the body also is not one member, but many. ... Yet now there are, indeed, many members, yet one body. (1 Corinthians 12.14, 20 cv)

Paul likened the body of Christ to the human body by describing it as one body with many members. In fact, the body of Christ is *the* Christ. In other words, metaphorically speaking, from head to toe, the body is representative of Christ Himself.

For even as the body is one and has many members, yet all the members of the one body, being many, are one body, **thus also is the Christ.** (1 Corinthians 12.12 cv)

The body of Christ is a spiritual body, which means that our oneness comes through one spirit, and that is the spirit of God. We could say that the spirit of God outside of us unites all of us together by the spirit of God within us.

God is spirit, and the body of Christ, today and in the future eons, will be a corporate, spiritual body in the likeness of the Son of God. As such, the body of Christ is so constituted that all the members are mutually dependent on one another. Each member is called to perform certain functions as given by God. It is not our choice but God's choice. It is a serious mistake to take on a function for which one is not divinely suited. It matters not whether the function is in a place of public prominence or is hidden. What matters is that we discover what we have been endowed to do and then do it to the honor and glory of God. This is just a thought, a proposal; but perhaps the reward we receive will have to do with our position or function in the corporate body of Christ. Like the function of our human bodies, every member will have a place in the corporate body that is necessary for the entire body to function as the complement of the Head as He gathers all unto Himself. No one will be left out, and all will be enjoyers of an allotment in the kingdom. Every one will be well-suited for their place and will receive the blessing of every spiritual blessing among the celestials.

This would answer why building the saints upon the foundation of Christ is a very serious matter for those graced to be builders, whether for planting or watering. Paul admonished all who build: *Are you not aware that you are a temple of God and the spirit of God is making its home in you? If anyone is corrupting the temple of God, God will be corrupting him, for the temple of God is holy, which you are* (1 Corinthians 3.16-17 cv). The building of today is in preparation for the eons of the eons. Each member of the body of Christ must be trained and encouraged to function in the body as graced by the spirit of God in preparation to function as a member of Christ's glorified, celestial body in the oncoming eons.

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Perhaps, how we function among one another in the body today will determine our place in the body among the celestials.

The natural, then the spiritual.

Let us be clear that describing believers collectively as a body is more than a metaphor, which is likening one thing to another thing. We might be tempted to think that in the mind of God the human body came first and then when the Son of God died for humanity and brought forth a people unto Himself, it seemed good to call this new creation the body of Christ because it was similar to a human body. However, as revealed through Paul, God has a principle that governs how He works in bringing about His purpose and plan through the eons.

However, **the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual.** (1 Corinthians 15.46 NASB)

In other words, in relation to the purpose of the eons, God first works in the natural realm and then in the spiritual. We could say that the natural is the type of the spiritual. However, God is spirit and all that He does is with a spiritual pattern in mind; that is, the natural is a reflection of a greater work He is doing and will do in the spiritual realm. We clearly see this in relation to the human body.

The human body was fashioned after the body of Christ, which was in the mind and heart of God before the disruption of the world, even before the eonian times. We could say that our physical bodies are a type of the body of Christ. When He created man, Elohim had the body of Christ in mind.

This can be seen in the account of Adam and Eve. Adam was formed out of the soil of the earth, and Eve was fashioned or built out of Adam's body. In other words, Eve was actually part of Adam's body. The Lord God (Yahweh Elohim) took a part from Adam and built Eve around this part. We see this fact in Adam's response when he looked upon the first woman and said: *"This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man"* (Genesis 2.23 NASB).

The woman was of the very bone and flesh of the man, and she became his helpmeet, a helper suitable for him. In what way was she to help Adam? She was fashioned so that Adam could have dominion or rule over the earth (Genesis 1.26). In other words, Adam had to have a helper in order to rule. Adam and Eve are a type of what would come, namely, that God the Father would bring forth another creation fashioned out of the life of His Son.

In like fashion, the Son of God, the second Man, the last Adam must have a helper in order for Him to rule in the eons of the eons. This helper is what Paul collectively called the body of Christ, for this body is fashioned out of the life of the One who is the Resurrection and the Life.

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If we remain with the figure of a body, we will see that during the eons of the eons when the body, which is the complement of the One completing the all in all (Ephesians 1.23 *cv*), is seated among the celestials in Christ, it will remain a body connected to the Head. With the heading up of all in view, Paul confirmed this fact by declaring that Christ, as the Head over all, is the Head of the ecclesia which is His body (Ephesians 1.22-23). In other words, the body of Christ will continue to be constituted as His body in the next eon and beyond.

This is an important point, for it may give us some indication of how the body will operate among the celestials in the eons of the eons. Keep in mind that the body of Christ refers to the collection of many bodies all joined together; namely, the body is comprised of individual members (believers). Each member will have a new body fashioned after Christ, and all the members together will make up the corporate body of Christ.

When we believe, we become a new creation in Christ, which means all earthly distinctions cease in Christ. Paul no longer knew Christ or any one else according to the flesh (see 2 Corinthians 5.16-17). However, there is much more to this new creation that waits to be manifested when Christ comes for His body. We have only arrived at this new creation in the spiritual sense, for in the eons to come, our new body will not be a remake of the old, something of the flesh. It will be a completely new entity fashioned out of entirely new materials that are spiritual and celestial (heavenly). Paul called it our habitation out of heaven (2 Corinthians 5.2; also see 1 Corinthians 15.42-57).

Although this is all future, we have a representation of the body on earth today in what many call the “church,” which I have preferred to call the *ecclesia*, based on the Greek. All who believe in Jesus are members of the one body of Christ. There are no rites or sacraments to perform, no membership rolls to put your name on, no covenant statements to sign, no special creeds to recite, no special procedures to follow to become a member of the body of Christ. When we first believe, we immediately become part of the body of Christ. Whether we truly function as a member in very practical ways is another matter altogether.

Until our Lord comes, we are to be joined together in love for one another.

Now, being true, in love we should be making **all grow into Him, Who is the Head—Christ**—out of Whom the entire body, being articulated together and united through every assimilation of the supply, in accord with the operation in measure of each one’s part, is making for the growth of the body, for **the upbuilding of itself in love**. (Ephesians 4.15-16 *cv*)

But we shall lovingly hold to the truth, and shall in all respects **grow up into union with Him who is our Head, even Christ**. Dependent on Him, the whole body—its various parts closely fitting and firmly adhering to one another—grows by the aid of every contributory link, with power

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proportioned to the need of each individual part, so as to **build itself up in a spirit of love.** (Ephesians 4.15-16 WNT)

But speaking the truth in love, may **grow up into him** in all things, which is **the head, even Christ:** From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the **edifying of itself in love.** (Ephesians 4.15-16 KJV)

As revealed in these three translations, the body is to grow up, to be built up in love. First, notice that the purpose of this growth is to grow up into the Head, which is Christ. In other words, the Head should always be in view in the growth of the body. Second, notice that it is the body itself that is to build itself up, and it is to do it in love. The love of God has been poured out into the heart of each believer through the Holy Spirit (Romans 5.5) so that each of us has been given a divine ability to do this labor of love.

This leads to a question: Given that there are millions upon millions of believers scattered across the globe today, how is it possible for the body to build itself up in love? The answer lies in the local ecclesia. We are to be part of the building up in love with brothers and sisters in our community or locality. It is through routine or daily contacts with one another that we will have opportunities to be built up in love. Each of us has been given graces or gifts which are to be used in this building process (see Romans 12.3-21; 13.8-10; 14.19; 1 Corinthians 12-13). Of course, in our modern world in which travel and communication have grown by leaps and bound, it is also possible to be built up with brethren in other parts of the world, but the primary building is to be done in the local ecclesia.

But what is the goal of the building up in love? According to Paul, the goal is to become a mature man that is the complement of Christ.

And the same One gives these, indeed, as apostles, yet these as prophets, yet these as evangelists, yet these as pastors and teachers, toward the adjusting of the saints for the work of dispensing, for the upbuilding of the body of Christ, unto the end that we should all attain to the unity of the faith and of the realization of the son of God, **to a mature man, to the measure of the stature of the complement of the Christ,** that we may by no means still be minors, surging hither and thither and being carried about by every wind of teaching, by human caprice, by craftiness with a view to the systematizing of the deception. (Ephesians 4.11-14 cv)

Today, pastors and teachers are the ones gifted to bring adjustment to the saints so that they can serve effectively in the body. These are not titles but rather are gifted responsibilities. Servants of Christ are given to adjust the saints through pastoring and teaching. Some translations use the words *equipping* or *perfecting* instead of *adjusting*. The purpose is to help the saints to do the work of upbuilding, to equip them or to perfect them for this work.

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Unfortunately, today many groups of believers place all their emphasis on their “pastor;” however, Paul was doing nothing of the sort. The emphasis was and should be on the purpose or the end, and that is the upbuilding until we all become a mature man that is the complement or the fullness or the exact image of Christ. The body of Christ is not to be like a bunch of children who need coddling and who are easily influenced by others. Rather, the body is to mature so that it is not carried about by every wind of teaching and the craftiness of the adversary who has done a mighty good job of deceiving the masses through a system of deception. If we are maturing in Christ and through the truth of His word, we will not be tossed to and fro with every new teaching or emphasis that comes along.

The truth of the word is essential for us to attain to the unity of the faith, but the only way that this upbuilding can effectively take place is through the love of God. Without love, there can be no building up of the body.

There are many things that could and should be said about this matter of building up, and it is most aptly expressed through the phrase *one another*. However, this is not the point to which I am driving. What I want you to see is the emphasis Paul placed on the body of Christ and the end or purpose of the upbuilding. It is to be a mature man, to be full of Christ so that we will function or operate truly as a body, which is a highly integrated system of members that operate in love, without conflict, without rancor, without discord, namely, without anything of the old humanity that hinders the very life of Christ from being expressed.

Just consider our physical bodies, which are nothing less than a miracle of God. When our bodies are working as they were designed to by God, they operate effortlessly and without our having to do anything to make the members function together. The physical operation of our body from the cells to the organs is a highly mechanized process that proceeds without our mind consciously telling the body what to do to function. The heart, the lungs, the kidneys, the liver, the mind and many other parts all work together so that we can go about our lives without telling each part what to do. Can you imagine what it would be like if we had to tell each part what to do throughout the day? “OK heart, keep pumping blood; and lungs, now breathe in and out.” Do you get the point? We would be occupied our entire day with managing the members of our body. Thank God; our bodies do not operate this way. Instead, when they are not ill, they operate almost flawlessly, seamlessly (without interruption), and effortlessly.

However, there is one aspect of our being that is somewhat different, and that involves our mind from which come our reasoning, our thinking, our decision-making and many other things related to what makes us human beings in the image of God. Of course, this deals with our spirit and soul, and as new creations in Christ, we are to be led by the spirit and not the soul. The spirit is to take command of the soul and the body and direct them in the ways of the Lord. We are to have the mind of Christ, and this mind is discovered in the spirit. Unfortunately, as long as we live in bodies of death and humiliation, we will

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continue in battle with the flesh of our old humanity. We need to be transfigured into the spiritual body to come into the perfection of the body as God designed it.

All this is presented to drive home the point that our physical bodies, led by the spirit, are a type of the mature man because this is how the body of Christ is to operate. This is the end to which the Lord is driving, and the end that is essential in the eons of the eons when the body of Christ enters the celestial realm to traverse both the spiritual and the physical realms, or the earthly and the heavenly realms.

When our bodies are transfigured to spiritual, glorified bodies like our Lord's body, we will truly be that mature man, the new creation in Christ. The corporate, celestial body of Christ will operate effortlessly as directed by the Head. It will operate as a perfectly harmonized body. After all, as stressed many times already, Christ will *present to Himself a glorious ecclesia, not having spot or wrinkle or any such things, but that it may be holy and flawless* (Ephesians 5.27 cv).

Now, I need to get to the point of all this. The point is that Paul's emphasis is on a mature, functioning, harmonized body that is seated together among the celestials in Christ and that is equipped to be the helpmeet of the Son of God as He heads up and sums up all things in the heavens and on the earth. As a new creation in Christ, we are called to be a body today, and we will be a glorious, flawless body in the eons of the eons. Personally, I think that the body of Christ trumps even being a king or a lord, for it is far more intimate and relational. The body is much closer to the heart of the Lord.

How will this body operate in the oncoming eons? Most likely, it will operate just as our bodies operate today. Each member will do its part to fulfill the goal of the body, which, in this case, is to fulfill the goal of Christ or, more explicitly, the purpose of the eons.

But this leads to a question: Are there kings in our human body, that is, are there parts that rule over others? Some might say that the heart rules for without the heart operating, we die. However, the same argument could be made for all the major organs. For example, we cannot live too long without the liver, the kidneys, or the brain. A better way to look at it is that some members have more important functions and as such are more vital to maintaining life. Nevertheless, they all must operate together and in a harmonized fashion if the body is to be healthy and vibrant. Even the more unseemly or weak members are vital for health. Simply, this is the way that God designed the physical body, and it is the way that the body of Christ is designed to operate. How do we know? Paul tells us so.

But it was God who built up the body, and bestowed more abundant honor on the part that felt the need, that there might be no disunion in the body, but that **all the members might entertain the same anxious care for one another's welfare**. And if one part is suffering, every other part suffers with it; or if one part is receiving special honor, every other part

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shares in the joy. As for you, **you are the body of Christ, and individually you are members of it.** (1 Corinthians 12.24b-27 WNT)

Nay, much rather, those members of the body supposed to be inherently weaker [less honorable] are necessary, and which we suppose to be a more dishonored part of the body, these we are investing with more exceeding honor, and our indecent members have more exceeding respectability. Now our respectable members have no need, **but God blends the body together**, giving to that which is deficient more exceeding honor, that there may be no schism in the body, but the members may be mutually solicitous for one another. And whether one member is suffering, all the members are sympathizing, or one member is being esteemed, all the members are rejoicing with it. **Now you are the body of Christ, and members of a part....** (1 Corinthians 12.22-27 CV [NASB])

Consequently, the body of Christ is more than the concept of kings and lords; there are only members of the whole. Kings and lords only can be in relation to ones outside the body but not those within the body. The body of Christ will be an integral part of Christ's reign over the universe, but we will have to wait to see how this will be manifested, or what it will look like.

As a result of the bema of Christ, perhaps some members will be given more honorable places (responsibilities) in the body and others less honorable places; nevertheless, each will be assigned as determined by our Lord Jesus, and each will be well-suited for their place. This is essential if the body is to operate as a flawless, perfect body in the image of the Son.

We will reign because our Head reigns; however, reigning with Christ is not governmental but relational. Each member will remain related to all the other members, and as a harmonized body, we will help Christ head up all things.

We will reign because we are related to the reigning Head of the universe and whatever He is doing we will be doing as our Head directs. He is the King of the universe, and we will reign with Him in this capacity.

I cannot tell you what reigning will look like but I know one thing; it will be based on love. **Reigning is the ascendancy of love.** The body of Christ is a vessel of love that is in a love relationship with the Son of God, for Christ loves the ecclesia, which is His body (Ephesians 5.25, 30). Of all God's creatures, the body of Christ will be the closest to the heartbeat of God for the eons of the eons. Perhaps, those who endure in the word and suffer evil will reign closest to the very heart of the Lord. They will be like the organs of the human body.

We could say that love will be king and as a vessel of love and grace, we will express this love as the complement of the Son of God's love. I can envision the body being an ambassador of love and reconciliation, with all the members of the body working together to bring the love of God in His Son to the far reaches of

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the universe and to all His creatures therein, as an expression of His lavish grace. What a glorious thought!

Until our Lord comes for His body, what are we to do? Endure in the word of truth, suffer evil and...

Walk in love.

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and **walk in love**, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma. (Ephesians 5.1-2 NASB)

We know no greater love than the love expressed at Calvary. God is love, and we are to walk in love as His children. Love God, love the Lord, love one another, and love the sinner. Love is practical; but more than this, it is sacrificial.

We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. (1 John 3.16 NASB)

This is walking in love. Christ manifested the love of God on the cross, and He now sits far above all. Be imitators of Christ, and you, too, will sit far above all with Him in the eons of the eons.

We are transported into the kingdom of the Son of His love for a reason. We are to be the Father's vessel of love that expresses His love and His grace throughout the entire empyrean.

This is the multifarious wisdom of God in accord with the purpose of God that will be made known among the celestials. Praise God!

7. THE EXPECTATION OF GLORY

According to Paul, we are to walk worthy of the God who calls us into His own kingdom and glory (1 Thessalonians 2.12). At least one translation uses the phrase *His own reign and glory* (YLT). The coming eon is about entering the celestial realm of the kingdom of God. Our place in the kingdom during the eons of the eons will be determined at the judgment seat (*bema, dais*) of God (*Christ*). Suffering and enduring in this day will lead to reigning with Christ in His day. Thus, we are called or invited into God's own reign and glory. This is a tremendous calling and something that is worth diligently pursuing while we are alive and thus remain, or until we fall asleep in Christ, and He comes in the air for us. Every day that passes increases the glorious possibility that our generation of believers may not see death but will be snatched up in the air as those who are alive and remain.

The conquering believers in Christ will be enjoyers of an allotment in the kingdom of God. The conquerors will receive a life that will be immortal, endless and spiritual, a life beyond death and corruption—a life no longer plagued with the thought of sin and death; a life no longer tossed to and fro by the adversity and the uncertainty of life in bodies of corruption; a life no longer led by the soul of a body that relies on the soil of this earth, but led by the spirit; a life no longer in spiritual battle with the dark forces among the celestials, for this new life will judge them; a life no longer restricted to the earth's atmosphere, but a life that enters an entirely different realm that is now reserved for the messengers or angels of God and in which our beloved Lord lives.

How do we enter into the reign and glory? We enter by the grace of God given to us in Christ Jesus, who is the Way, the Truth, the Resurrection, and the Life. There is no other way, for no one, not even those who believe in this day, are worthy of God's grace. Grace is that overwhelming power of God that takes the ugly and transforms it into the joyously beautiful and that comes through believing in God's Son and the finished work of His cross.

Grace is God's favor poured out on the ugly, the unbeliever, and the sinner. We are not worthy of God's grace. No one of mankind is worthy, but in God's grace, all mankind will eventually be brought into the glory of God. If we were to have a balance sheet with God in which our merits were listed on one side and our demerits were listed on the other side, we would discover that we all have no merits, only demerits. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. *Sin* means "to miss," and all mankind has missed the mark of God. But thank God, in and through the Son of God, all mankind will experience the grace of God, not all at once, but each in its own class and in its own era. We, who have been called and chosen of God before the disruption of the world, have the glorious blessing of receiving the grace of God in this day so that we might enter the glory of the eons of the eons with Christ.

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If this does not excite your heart, then nothing will.

Now, grace and glory go hand-in-hand, and as we near the conclusion of this book that has been titled *The Purpose of the Eons*, it is appropriate that we consider glory or, more specifically, the expectation of glory.

The number of times the word *glory* appears in the English translations of the sacred Scriptures varies considerably from a low of 209 times to a high of 434 times. Most of the variation occurs in the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament), for there are at least ten Hebrew words that could be translated into the word *glory*. There is more uniformity in the translations of the Greek Scriptures (New Testament), where the word *glory* is discovered from 165 to 174 times, based on one primary Greek word, *doxa*. What we need to see is that the word *glory* is a very significant word in Scripture and one worthy of our utmost consideration.

To look at every verse in context is beyond the scope of this chapter; therefore, this study has been restricted to mostly Paul's epistles and, even with this, only a few verses are presented. Nevertheless, I trust the spirit of God to open the eyes of your heart to be enlightened as to the true nature of glory.

According to Paul, glory is to be revealed to us (Romans 8.18). We are to be glorying in expectation of the glory of God (Romans 5.2). We are to know the riches of His glory (Romans 9.23; Ephesians 1.18; 3.16; Colossians 3.4). We are to be raised in glory (1 Corinthians 15.43). We are to be transformed into the image of Christ, from glory to glory (2 Corinthians 3.18). We are to come into the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God (2 Corinthians 4.6). We are to suffer momentary light afflictions for the eonian burden (weight) of glory (2 Corinthians 4.17). We are to come into the glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing, being holy and blameless (Ephesians 5.27). We are to be transformed into conformity with the body of His glory (Philippians 3.21). All our needs are to be supplied according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4.19). We are to be revealed with Christ in glory (Colossians 3.4). We are called into God's own kingdom and glory (1 Thessalonians 2.12). We are to gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thessalonians 2.14; 2 Timothy 2.10). We will be taken up in glory (1 Timothy 3.16). We are to be looking for the blessed expectation and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus (Titus 2.13).

These verses alone should pique your interest in this essential matter of glory.

The evangel of the glory of Christ.

Paul uniquely called his evangel *the evangel of the glory of Christ*, which he was called to dispense to the nations. It is the good news of the glory of Christ. We will never know glory apart from our beloved Lord. Praise God; when we are saved, we are placed on a pathway to glory that will never fade but will only grow brighter and brighter until the new day dawns.

THE EXPECTATION OF GLORY

The god of this eon blinds the understanding of the unbelievers to this evangel, but for those who believe, it is illuminated to be seen spiritually with the expectation that one day, we pray soon, we will literally see and experience glory in spiritual bodies of glory.

In his second epistle to the Corinthians, Paul first mentioned this evangel in light of Moses receiving a fading glory when the Lord appeared to him on the mountain. Moses' glory had to be covered, but the glory of Christ is unveiled to the spiritual.

Now, if our evangel is covered, also, it is covered in those who are perishing, in whom the god of this eon blinds the apprehensions of the unbelieving so that **the illumination of the evangel of the glory of Christ**, Who is the Image of the invisible God, does not irradiate them. For we are not heralding ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, yet ourselves your slaves because of Jesus, for the God Who says that, out of darkness light shall be shining, is He Who shines in our hearts, with a view to **the illumination of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ**. (2 Corinthians 4.3-6 *cv*)

We are no longer in darkness like the rest of the world, for God has shone in our hearts a view of which the world of darkness knows nothing. It is a view that enlightens our heart with the knowledge of the glory of God. How do we come to know this glory? It is in the face of Jesus Christ. We do not see Him with our physical eye but rather with our spiritual eye; with the eye of the heart we see Jesus and, in Him, we see the glory of God. How do we see Jesus? Where does this spiritual sight begin? It begins as we see Him in Scripture and, in some measure, through life's experiences.

As John recorded: *And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth* (John 1.14 *NASB*). John, along with the other disciples from among the circumcision, in many respects, only saw the veiled glory of Jesus, the Man. It was not until He was transfigured on the mount in the presence of Peter, James and John that the hidden glory of Christ broke forth in a preview of Christ in His coming kingdom and glory. In that precious moment on the mount, John and the others beheld His glory (see Matthew 17.1-8).

However, Paul saw the risen and glorified Christ in heaven (Acts 9.1-19) and was charged with unveiling the marvelous glory of the Lord to the nations. He saw the Lord in glory, and the secret of all that this means was unveiled to this most unlikely Pharisee.

Through Paul's evangel, the eyes of our heart are opened to see that Christ is the image of the invisible God. No man can see God, but He has given us His exact image in His beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. As we behold the Son, we see the Father. As we behold the glory of Christ, we behold the glory of God. The

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Father delights in His Son and delights to reveal His Son to us and in us. This is why Paul, in his letter to Timothy, called it the evangel of the glory of the happy God (1 Timothy 1.11 cv), with which he was entrusted.

Paul is the apostle of the nations and, according to his own words, he was charged to dispense the evangel of the glory of Christ to the nations.

Let us be perfectly clear that glory does not come apart from Christ; there is no other way to glory but through Christ. The Lord of glory was crucified so that we can enter the glory of the Lord. Christ is our Life, and He is our Expectation. Paul wrote to Timothy, his beloved child of the faith, and declared that the Lord Jesus Christ is our *Expectation* (1 Timothy 1.1 cv). Christ is among us to bring us into His glory.

Christ among the nations.

The secret which has been concealed from the eons and from the generations, yet now was made manifest to His saints, to whom God wills to make known what are the glorious riches of this secret among the nations, which is: **Christ among you, the expectation of glory....** (Colossians 1.26-27 cv)

Paul was given the charge to dispense the secret of God in Christ. Today, it is no longer to remain secret, for it has been revealed through Paul's epistles. Notice that in these verses, Paul referred to the glorious riches of the secret of God, and this secret was made known among the nations. It was one secret, and this secret is that Christ is among the nations, the expectation of glory. In other words, He is among those who have been called out from among the nations, which refers to the believers of the body of Christ.

When He came to this earth in His first advent, Jesus walked among the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Some of the Jews beheld His glory (John 1.14) but many rejected Him; consequently, they rejected His glory as well. But through the apostle of the nations, we are told that Christ is now among the nations. Of course, He is not walking among us in the literal sense so that we can see Him with our physical eyes. In spirit, He is among the nations that comprise His spiritual body, the ecclesia.

Christ among you, the nations, is the expectation of glory. In other words, because Christ is among us, we can be assured that glory will come to us one day. He has not left us nor forsaken us but continues to walk among us to bring us into His glory. What comfort this should bring to our hearts!

Further, Christ is now walking among the unbelievers of the nations and is saving many in these dark days right before His arrival in the air. Praise God!

THE EXPECTATION OF GLORY

Now, this is all well and good as sound doctrine, but let us ask ourselves a practical question.

What is our expectation or hope?

If this question were asked of believers, most would probably respond that their expectation is eternal life. Of course, by now the reader should understand that Scripture refers to eonian life and not eternal life. Nevertheless, inherent in the response of eternal life is the thought of an endless life. Those who will have the joy of entering the celestial realm in the next eon will enter into the fullness of eonian life, which really is the same as having an endless or eternal life.

No matter which term one uses—eonian life, endless life or eternal life—the expectation is actually summed up in the word *immortality*. Isn't immortality truly the desire or expectation of believers?

What is immortality? It is having life beyond death, that is, a life that can no longer be touched by death. If there is no longer death, there also can no longer be sin, for death brings on sin. *Through one man sin entered into the world, and through sin death, and thus death passed through into all mankind, on which all sinned* (Romans 5.12 cv). Death brought sin into mankind and in death sin reigns. Remove death and sin can no longer exist. Thus, being immortal puts the believer beyond death in which sin reigns. The sting of death, which is sin, is swallowed up by victory, for which we will be forever praising and thanking God, who is giving us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ (see 1 Corinthians 15.54-57).

As tremendous as *immortality* is, the word in itself does not tell us anything about endless life other than there will be no death or sin. This truly is tremendous, but it tells us little of the quality or the character of the life that the believer will have in the eons of the eons and beyond into what could be called eternity. How do we know that living forever will not be a boring or dull existence? How do we know that it will be a most pleasing and satisfying existence? How do we know that it will answer every desire of our heart beyond anything we hope or expect? How do we know that it will be beyond anything our eye has seen and our ear has heard (1 Corinthians 2.9)?

We need something to qualify immortality, some expectation of what immortality will be like. We know that we will be with the Lord forever, but even this thought does not tell us what it will be like. What will it be like to be in the presence of the Lord?

Sure and certain hope—expectation.

The answer to these questions lies in the word *glory*, for in this word we discover the expectation of the believer and what immortality is all about. We are to expect glory. What does expectation mean? It means the sure and certain hope in something that we cannot see today but fully expect to see in a future day. Hope

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as revealed in Scripture has no uncertainty implied in its meaning. The hope that Paul revealed is a sure thing, and we should never doubt for a moment that it will come to pass, for as sure as Christ was raised from among the dead, our hope, one day, will be manifested.

When the fulfillment of our hope comes, then hope will be no more. As Paul wrote: *Hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees?* (Romans 8.24 NASB). Today, faith, hope, and love abide, but in the coming eons only love, the greatest of these, will abide.

Paul referred to hope in several ways. We are to abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 15.13). We are waiting for the hope of righteousness (Galatians 5.5). We are called in one hope of our calling (Ephesians 4.4). We have a hope laid up for us in the heavens (Colossians 1.5). We have the steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father (1 Thessalonians 1.3). We have the hope of salvation (1 Thessalonians 5.8). We fix our hope on the living God (1 Timothy 4.10; 5.5). We have the hope of eonian life (Titus 1.2; 3.7).

Further, a word that, most likely, many fail to grasp declares that the Father of glory has the hope of His calling (see Ephesians 1.17-18). The call going out to the ecclesia, which is the body of Christ, comes from the Father of glory. This alone indicates that the hope and calling have something to do with glory.

Hope or expectation is something great, with many dimensions to it. Paul was not alone in bringing to light the hope that is in Christ, for many call Peter the apostle of hope. However, Paul was unique among the apostles, for he has revealed to us the reconciliation of all, the justification of all, and God being *All* in all, which ultimately is the hope of all mankind, whether mankind knows it or not. Further, Paul alone has given us the unique expression *the expectation of glory*.¹

Glory is to be seen and experienced.

The expectation of glory means that we are to expect glory. We are to anticipate it, to desire it, and to long for it. But what is glory? If we do not know what it is, how will we know what to expect?

In Scripture, we discover the expressions the God of glory (Acts 7.2), the Father of glory (Ephesians 1.17), and the Lord of glory (1 Corinthians 2.8). We also

¹ The Concordant Version uses the word *expectation* in place of the word *hope*. *Expectation* is probably the more accurate rendering, for within this word is the concept of hope with the added dimension of certainty that what is not seen will most definitely come to pass. In the world, the word *hope* does not always convey the thought of certainty. Many people hope for things that they never receive. In this regard, it is more like a wish or wishful thinking than a sure thing. The hope of the believer will not disappoint (Romans 5.5). It cannot disappoint, for it has no uncertainty in it. Consequently, expectation more appropriately describes our hope. Henceforth, the word *expectation* will be used.

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discover the expressions the glory of God (e.g., Acts 7.55; Romans 3.23; 5.2; Philippians 2.11; Revelation 21.11), the glory of Christ (2 Corinthians 4.4), and the glory of the Lord (2 Corinthians 3.18; 8.19). On the one hand, glory is presented as coming forth from God and His Son. On the other hand, glory is presented as an attribute of God and His Son that is theirs alone. As we behold God and His Son, we behold their glory. In other words, it is a descriptor of who they are. We behold the Son, and we must proclaim glory. When the Son shines upon us or moves in our lives in very special ways, we too proclaim glory. However, this alone does not explain glory to us.

Actually, glory is a difficult word to define. In many respects, glory is something to be seen and to experience. Mere words seem to fall far short of expressing the depths of glory. There are many facets to this word. Glory does not stand alone in Scripture, for it is often joined with other words or concepts, such as grace, light, love, freedom, oneness, and happiness. It is through these concepts or attributes of God that we see glory. We could say that *glory is an outcome*. The outcome of grace is glory. The outcome of love is glory. When glory bursts forth there is freedom, there is oneness, and there is happiness. At times, glory is likened to something that is heavy, as a weight or burden. And yet, glory is often portrayed as light; perfect, unadulterated light. God is light, and when we see God in the face of Christ, we see glory.

Glory must be seen and experienced in the Person of our Lord Jesus. It is not something to grasp through head knowledge or intellect. Most assuredly, when we enter the celestial realm, behold our beloved Lord Jesus and grasp our spiritual bodies, the new creation in Christ, one word will come forth from our transformed lips: "*Glory!*"

This reminds me of the day when my beloved wife was faced with a very serious, even life-threatening illness. I stood in the emergency room of the hospital and looked down at my wife as she lay on the stretcher ready to be taken into the operating room to have surgery. We did not know what the outcome would be with this illness, whether it would be life or death. The doctors did not give us much hope. All we could do was trust the whole matter to the Lord that His will would be done. Our prayer was: "Lord, Thy will, will be done and to You will go all the glory." This was not a prayer for healing; it was an acknowledgment of faith that God's will was being worked out in this situation no matter what the outcome. In death, God would receive the glory. In life, God would receive the glory. Either way, it would be to the glory of God.

The grace of God came upon both of us in such a powerful way that the peace of God that surpasses all understanding filled our hearts. I will never forget looking at the lovely face of my wife as she lay there. Her body was in distress, but her spirit was soaring among the celestials in glory. She looked so peaceful, so calm, so rested, even as she was about to enter something that was filled with risk and uncertainty. I not only saw and experienced grace that day, but I also saw glory. I cannot describe it; all I can say is that I saw the glory of God in the face of my

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wife. I will carry this image in my heart until the day that we enter glory. Grace and glory go hand-in-hand, and we experienced both over the months that followed as the Lord began to restore her back to health. We experienced the outcome of the lavish grace of God; the outcome of grace upon grace was glory unto glory. We give God all the praise and glory!

The point of sharing this is that no matter how much any of us write or teach on the matter of grace and glory, there is always this sense that we have merely touched the edges of the essence of God's grace and glory. Mere words that attempt to explain these gifts of God seem to fall short. Grace and glory are to be experienced and to be seen, not merely talked about.

Glory is the outcome of grace.

In unfolding one of the pillars of his evangel, Paul brought grace and glory together.

Being, then, justified by faith, we may be having peace toward God, through our Lord, Jesus Christ, through Whom we have the access also, by faith, into **this grace in which we stand, and we may be glorying in expectation of the glory of God.** (Romans 5.1-2 cv)

We are justified by faith so that we may have peace toward God. *Peace* refers to being reconciled to God. *Justification* and *reconciliation* go hand-in-hand. *Grace* is what gives us access to God, and by faith we are to stand in grace and be glorying in expectation of the glory of God. Notice we are to be glorying, which means that our justification and reconciliation give us a foretaste of glory. So, right from the beginning of our being justified by faith we are to have the expectation of glory. We could say that as we stand in the grace of God, we glory in the expectation of the glory of God that is ours in Christ Jesus, our Lord. It is by grace that we see the glory of God and will come into His glory. The two are inseparable.

To add to this thought, we are given a word of encouragement about grace and glory through a Psalm.

For the LORD God is **a sun and shield**; the LORD gives **grace and glory**; no good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly.
(Psalm 84.11 NASB)

The Lord gives grace and glory, which is a good thing. He does not withhold grace and glory from His people who walk uprightly or with integrity. This is an encouragement to press on toward the goal, to run the race of the faith according to the rules, to get hold of eonian life.

It is significant that this verse starts with the Lord God is a sun and shield, for these describe glory and grace. Glory is a sun and grace is a shield. As a shield,

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grace keeps us, protects us and preserves us for God and His Son. It is by God's grace that we will arrive safely at His celestial kingdom. Glory is a sun which means it is a light, but not just any light; it refers to God who is Light and to His Son who is the Light of the world. Consider these verses.

This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that **God is Light**, and in Him there is no darkness at all. (1 John 1.5 NASB)

In Him was life, and **the life was the Light of men**. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. (John 1.4-5 NASB)

Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, "**I am the Light of the world;** he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have **the Light of life.**" (John 8.12 NASB)

God, who is the invisible God and Father, is Light, and His Son, who is the visible image of God, is the Light of the world. There is no darkness or even shadow in them. They represent the purest of light in which no evil, or no sin, or no imperfection of any kind lurks. Darkness often refers to that which is evil, but in the Son there is no evil of any kind.

My wife's illness could be placed in the category of something ugly. After all, when we face death, is this not something ugly? But praise God; the overwhelming grace of God transformed what was ugly into something joyously beautiful, the glory of God. When we see the grace of God in action, it brings joy to our hearts. It makes us happy, and the outcome is glory. It is like being refreshed and cleansed in the light of God. Again, words seem to fail in describing glory.

Glory is light.

Nevertheless, as we press on in this matter, as we have seen, glory can refer to the purest of light. In encouraging the saints, Paul wrote that God the Father makes us competent for a part of the allotment of the saints, in light.

Therefore we also, from the day on which we hear, do not cease praying for you and requesting that you may be filled full with the realization of His will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, you to walk worthily of the Lord for all pleasing, bearing fruit in every good work, and growing in the realization of God; being endued with all power, in accord with the might of His glory, for all endurance and patience with joy; at the same time giving thanks to the Father, **Who makes you competent for a part of the allotment of the saints, in light, Who rescues us out of the jurisdiction of Darkness, and transports us into the kingdom of the Son of His love....** (Colossians 1.9-13 cv)

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Paul contrasted the jurisdiction of darkness and the kingdom of the Son of His love. One kingdom or domain is dark, and the other is light. The enjoyment of an allotment will be an allotment in the kingdom of light. What does this mean? It means that in the kingdom there will be absolutely no evil, no corruption, no illness, no sin, no death, no war, no pain, no suffering, and the list could go on almost endlessly. The kingdom of light is one in which everything is as pure as the Son of God is pure. There will be no imperfection in the kingdom of the Son of God's love. This is the glory of God, for God is Light, and His Son is Light.

All imperfections, all darkness, all failures, all the bad will be settled at the bema of Christ so that we will enter the celestial realm unhindered and unencumbered; set free from corruption and all that hinders the glory of God.

Today, our Lord makes His home in inaccessible light that no man can perceive, for Christ alone possesses immortality.

He is King of kings and Lord of lords, Who alone has immortality, **making His home in light inaccessible**, Whom not one of mankind perceived nor can be perceiving, to Whom be honor and might eonian! Amen! (1 Timothy 6.15b-16 cv)

Praise God; a day is coming when the body of Christ will possess His immortality and will enter the kingdom of light, which is the kingdom of glory. So, we can see that, in some respects, light and glory are the same.

Glory is the outcome of love.

Further, just as grace and glory, and light and glory go together, so do love and glory go together.

“Father, those whom Thou hast given Me, I will that, where I am, they also may be with Me, that they may be **beholding My glory** which Thou has given Me, for **Thou lovest Me** before the disruption of the world.” (John 17.24 cv)

Love brings forth glory. The Father and the Son have an unbroken, unrestrained love relationship that must reach out to all mankind and all creation. However, until the consummation of the eons, only those who are the Lord's in our current eon and the eons of the eons to follow will be with the Lord in glory. They will behold His glory that He alone possesses as the Son of God. In love, Christ will reveal Himself to His people. When love is unrestrained, glory breaks forth.

The kingdom of glory is the kingdom of the Son of God's love. Love and glory go hand-in-hand. Again, when we believe, we are transported into the *spiritual* kingdom of the Son of His love (Colossians 1.13). In His kingdom, we are bathed in the love of God that is in the Son, and we experience the glory of God.

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In the midst of our trial, my wife and I knew the love of God for us and the love that we have for each other. In her days of illness, we saw glory and love kiss each other in such a way that it is hard to describe. Obviously, this is poetic language, but it is meant to convey the thought that glory is the outcome of love. When we see the love of Christ manifested, we have to say that we behold the glory of Christ.

But again, words seem to fail in describing glory.

Glory is freedom.

When you woke this day, you did not know what the day would bring. You probably had many thoughts on your mind, some good, some bad, and some perplexing. You had to make a multitude of decisions. You most likely were also bombarded with a host of thoughts, perhaps doubts and things that bothered your mind. You may be struggling with some sin in your life or with some conflict with another person. Perhaps you have had some anger build up in you over some conflict you have encountered. Perhaps you are feeling ill or hungry. Perhaps your day started out good and joy filled your heart but now it is gone and you are wondering what tomorrow will bring. Perhaps your soul is screaming at you for some form of pleasure and satisfaction. Perhaps you are suffering in some manner. Perhaps you are uncertain about your future and perplexed as to what lies ahead and how you should proceed. The list of issues that you have faced and that you will face tomorrow, the next day and all the days to follow seem countless. We could say that this list contains many points of darkness and shadows in the midst of light. It would be the most unusual person that goes through a week without some weight or pressure weighing down his spirit, soul and body, without some darkness or shadow lurking in his day.

Meditate on these questions: What would it be like to live free of all these countless weights and pressures, with no darkness clouding your days; to live free of the pressures and demands of the soul? What would it be like to live every day in the most marvelous light with no doubts, worries, cares, or uncertainties? What would it be like to live in the perfect light of God? What would it be like to live in perfect righteousness, joy, peace, and love? What would it be like to live every moment for God, bringing Him pleasure and delight? What would it be like to be in continual fellowship with our God and our Lord? What would it be like to be bathed continually in the love of God?

Dear brethren, this is a glimpse of glory. It is being set free from all the weighty encumbrances of living in bodies of death that only bring us affliction of body, soul, and spirit. It is living in the full expression or complement of God's Son.

Living in the pure light of God is living in freedom. Glory is freedom! We see this in Paul's message to the Romans. All creation is groaning as it waits to be set free from the slavery of corruption into the glorious freedom of the children of God. When we are set free, all creation will be set free as well. All creation groans and

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travails along with us until that day comes in which the children of God are freed from the corruption brought on our bodies by sin and death (see Romans 8.15-25). Freedom means glory!

During the time of my wife's illness, we experienced a freedom that we had never known. We were cast upon the Lord; we were bathed in His love; we were shut in with the Lord, and all the cares and uncertainties of the situation faded from our sight. Each day was a new day to trust the Lord and to experience His life. This does not mean that we did not have what could be called "bad days," for we most surely did, but when we look back over those days, we both realize that there was a power beyond us that moved us along each day. We could say that they were momentary light afflictions; they were only for a moment, and then the grace of God overwhelmed and the glory of God shone brightly on the situation and we were at peace and in love with one another in a way that we never knew in our 30 years of marriage. To God be the glory!

As Paul experienced a daily renewal within (see 2 Corinthians 4.16), we can say that something was renewed within both of us during this time that has remained with us even after four years.

Glory is the image of the Lord's glory.

What is this renewal within? It has to do with grace producing glory within our spirit, our inner man. We are to go from glory to glory as we are transformed into the image of the Lord's glory. Notice that the image we are to take on is glory, which means it is actually an appearance just like our Lord.

Now the Lord is the spirit; yet where the spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. Now we all, with uncovered face, mirroring **the Lord's glory**, are **being transformed into the same image, from glory to glory**, even as from the Lord, the spirit. (2 Corinthians 3.17-18 cv)

Do you see how Paul connected freedom to glory? We may not see it but it is there, doing a work on the inside of all of us that will burst forth just as it did with the Lord on the mount of transfiguration. It is His life within that is doing the transforming work. *We are being conformed* to His image. This is a present work of the spirit of the Lord. His spirit is a freeing spirit.

Glory to glory comes as we see more of the secret of the evangel of the glory of Christ. We are to continually see Christ in this evangel. As the secrets of God were revealed to him, Paul went from glory to glory. He began by seeing the body of Christ taken up in the air, then he saw all the members of the body changed in the twinkling of an eye, then he saw the third heaven of the new creation, then he saw the body of Christ as a new creation in Christ identified with the new creation, and then he saw the new creation in Christ ascend to the heavenly realm, seated among the celestials. In this evangel, we see the Lord's glory, and the more we see Him and His glory, the more we are transformed into the same image.

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Dear brethren, this is going from glory to glory. As the secret of the evangel of the glory of Christ is revealed to our heart, we too go from glory to glory until we see ourselves seated among the celestials and, one day, we literally will be seated among the celestials in glory. Until that day, we are, in some measure, to experience the grace and glory of God in Christ Jesus through the spirit of the Lord as we are being transformed into His image of glory, from glory to glory. However, this requires suffering in this day.

Glory is heavy.

Paul wrote of the struggle that he had in bringing the evangel to the nations. He was afflicted in every way, and he declared that death worked in him but life in the Corinthians (see 2 Corinthians 4.7-12). He was continually encouraged by the spreading of grace to more and more people. He did not lose heart even as he recognized that his outward man was decaying, as it suffered daily affliction. However, something within him was being renewed day by day.

For all is because of you, that the grace, increasing through the majority, should be **superabounding in thanksgiving to the glory of God**. Wherefore we are not despondent, but even if our outward man is decaying, nevertheless that within us is being renewed day by day. For **the momentary lightness of our affliction is producing for us a transcendently transcendent eonian burden of glory**, at our not noting what is being observed, but what is not being observed, for what is being observed is temporary, yet what is not being observed is eonian. (2 Corinthians 4.15-18 cv)

For the all things are because of you, that the grace having been multiplied, because of the thanksgiving of the more, may **abound to the glory of God**; wherefore, we faint not, but if also our outward man doth decay, yet the inward is renewed day by day; for **the momentary light matter of our tribulation, more and more exceedingly an age-during weight of glory doth work out for us....** (2 Corinthians 4.15-17 YLT)

Paul considered the affliction that he encountered as momentary (for a season) and light compared to the glory to come in the eons or the ages to follow. The suffering and affliction of this day is child's play compared to what is to come to us in the eons. It is in suffering that we become more like our Lord. If indeed we are suffering together, we will be glorified together also (Romans 8.17). We are to glory in our afflictions, for they produce endurance and testedness that result in expectation (Romans 5.3-5).

The word *burden* or *weight* has the meaning of being "heavy." We might think that something heavy does not sound very good, but we must understand that we will have bodies like our Lord's body, and they will be able to carry the weight or burden of glory. The bodies of death that we occupy today would be crushed under the weight or burden of glory. It is as if Paul wanted the brethren to know

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that glory is a crushing thing to that which is not suited for it. Glory is something very special; it requires a very special body to take on the exceedingly great glory of God or, as the Concordant Version states, *a transcendently transcendent eonian burden of glory*.

This makes the glory that is for all who are conformed to the image of Christ something beyond measure. No mere mortal can ever experience this glory. It requires the resurrection and transformation that comes when the Son comes from heaven to meet us in the air.

Resurrection and transformation bring us into immortality, and immortality leads us into glory, and this comes about through Christ who is the Resurrection, the Life, and our Expectation of glory.

Glory is Christ's body.

For our realm is inherent in the heavens, out of which we are awaiting a Saviour also, the Lord, Jesus Christ, Who will transfigure the body of our humiliation, **to conform it to the body of His glory**, in accord with the operation which enables Him even to subject all to Himself. (Philippians 3.20-21 cv)

Today, we occupy bodies of humiliation. Those of us who have a few years under our belts remember when we were young and full of energy. Then, our bodies seemed almost indestructible. However, as we have aged in our earthly tents, the humiliation of our bodies has become more and more apparent, and we long to be freed from these restricted and disease-prone bodies. We long to be like our Lord and put on His celestial body.

Our hope is to be like our Lord one day, to be conformed to the body of His glory. No more humiliation, no more suffering, no more disease, no more death! We have been sown in dishonor, but when Christ comes, we will be roused in glory. Today, we wear the image of the soilish, but then we will be wearing the image of the Celestial (see 1 Corinthians 15.47-49 cv). Hallelujah!

Whenever Christ, our Life, should be manifested, then you also shall be manifested **together with Him in glory**. (Colossians 3.4 cv)

Not only will we be conformed to His body of glory, but we will be in glory. Entering the coming celestial kingdom will be glory through and through. This is all possible because Christ is our Life, and when He is manifested as who He is, we will be manifested as He is. Think about it!

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Glory is oneness.

Being conformed to the body of His glory is an individual glorification, but according to our Lord Jesus, glory is oneness of the body as well.

And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one.... (John 17.22 KJV)

The Father and the Son are one in glory, and all who belong to Christ are to share in Christ's glory and be one.

Paul wrote of the one body of Christ (Ephesians 4.4; Colossians 3.15). Today, it seems that what we see with our eyes that most people call the "church" is parted and far from expressing oneness. There are so many divisions among God's people that it seems that the Lord's prayer to His Father has not been answered. But let us not be distracted by what our eyes see. What matters is what the Lord sees and knows to be His body. The Lord knows those who are His (2 Timothy 2.19). Do we think that this prayer has gone unanswered and that the glory given to the Lord will not yield oneness? May it not be coming to that!

Paul exhorted the saints who are faithful in Christ Jesus with this matter of oneness.

There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4.4-6 NASB)

This is the spiritual reality. The one body was hidden as a secret from all the previous generations. In many respects, the true ecclesia, which is the body of Christ, remains a secret to the world at large and to Christendom itself. All that we see is a shell that many call the "church." But what does God see? He sees the true ecclesia. We might not see it, but the Lord sees it, and when He comes for His body, glory will come forth as well. Glory demands oneness, for Paul revealed the very heart of oneness. There is one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

The Father will answer the prayer of His Son, and all His people will be one with one God in glory. There can be no glory without oneness, but we can be assured that in glory there is oneness. Praise God!

Glory is seem.

This leads us to attempt to answer the question of what is glory. There does not seem to be a good definition of glory, but the following is offered for consideration.

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The word *glory* is translated from the Greek word *doxa*. The Concordant Greek Text sublinear word for *doxa* is *esteem*. The Greek-English Keyword Concordance word for *doxa* is *seem*, which is defined as “a highly favorable opinion and that which impresses on the senses or the mind.” Both *esteem* and *seem* have similar meanings. However, let us start by looking at the common meaning of *seem*.

According to Webster’s Dictionary, the word *seem* is derived from a Middle English word that means “to conform to” or “to bring into agreement.” It is defined as “to appear to be,” “to appear to exist,” or “to be apparently true.”

It would make for very awkward reading if we used the word *seem* in the place of *glory*. The word *esteem* fits a little better into these verses. Christ among you, the expectation of *esteem*; together with Him in *esteem*; conformed to the body of His *esteem*. Each conveys the thought of coming into a highly favorable place (opinion). Of course, Christ truly is highly favorable. However, if we carefully consider the definition of *seem*, we will see an apparent truth of Scripture. The key words in the definition are *conform*, *agreement*, *exist*, and *true*.

What is God’s purpose for mankind? The answer is given in Genesis, the book of beginnings. Man was created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1.26). We were created to look and be like the Son of God, to be in His likeness and image, to be like Him in appearance, in character and in *glory*. When creation looks at the sons of God, they are to see an image of the Son who is the Image of the invisible God (Colossians 1.15). The Son of God reflects God the Father, and the sons of God are to reflect the Son of God. It is like the moon and the sun. At night, the moon shines brightly, not because it has any light of its own, but because the sun, which is hidden from sight, is shining on it and giving it light. This is a picture of the sons of God reflecting the image and likeness of the Son of God.

When all the saints and, eventually, all mankind (at the consummation) put off corruption and put on incorruption, and put off mortality and put on immortality, there is only one word to describe such a wonder. The word is *glory*.

Glory means that mankind is conformed to the Image of the invisible God as reflected in His Son. It means that all mankind reach their ultimate destiny and purpose for being, and that is to be in agreement with God, and God to be in agreement with His entire creation; to exist in the true state in which God always intended man to be. There is no more discord, no more disagreement, no more separation, no more hatred, no more evil, no more darkness, no more sin, no more death, no more crying, no more fear, and no more disappointment.

We could say that *glory* is reaching God’s intended end, which is explained in the purpose of the eons.

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Glory is the happy God.

When mankind is in total and absolute agreement with God, then God is the happy God, the God who is fully satisfied, the God who fills *All* in all, and the God who fills the entire creation with love. The entire creation is in love with God the Father of mankind. This is reconciliation!

Now, to some, the happy God might be a strange expression. However, in his first letter to Timothy, Paul had to deal with some issues which opposed the sound teaching, the evangel with which he was entrusted.

If any other thing is opposing sound teaching, in accord with **the evangel of the glory of the happy God**, with which I was entrusted. (1 Timothy 1.10b-11 cv)

Paul described his evangel, which contained the secrets of God, as the evangel of the glory of the happy God. *Happy* means “joyousness springing from within.” In other words, when God is happy, glory springs from within Him and flows throughout His creation. What will bring supreme happiness to God? When mankind is fully reconciled to Him through His Son!

Glory will be the happy God when His end is reached.

God’s glory will no longer be measured out, but it will burst forth to fill all when everything in God’s creation is in total, absolute harmony and *agreement* with God. Everything in God’s creation will pour forth the very life of God, for He will be in all. Everything in God’s creation will come into the reason for its *existence*. Everything in God’s creation will continually worship God and pour forth songs of praise, adoration, and love that will make one harmonious tune that soothes the heart of God. Everything in God’s creation will be *true*; there will be nothing false. Everything in God’s creation will be in a *highly favorable opinion which is impressed on the senses and the mind*. Everything in God’s creation will be *highly favorable* to Him and be the delight of His heart. Everything in God’s creation will be in a continual state of ecstasy—full of love, joy, peace, righteousness, and absolute *harmony*.

It will be like a finely-tuned orchestra that plays a continual love song that flows through the heart of creation. All creation will be reconciled to God!

Glory is wow!

This is not based on Scripture, but when we enter glory, the one expression or word that I believe will come forth from believers and, eventually, all mankind will be—*Wow!* Glory is wow!

I recall the first time I stood on the edge of the Grand Canyon and gazed upon the majesty of this natural phenomenon. What came forth from my lips was “wow.”

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Can you imagine what it will be like to not only gaze upon the glory of God but to be in the glory of God? Wow!

Glory is God is All in all.

There is only one way to sum up glory. It is summed up in the word *all*. Glory is when Christ is *All* in all, and God is *All* in all. We could say that glory is the outcome of *all*.

Does your heart long for the day in which God is fully satisfied and He fills His entire creation? In that day, it will *seem*, for life will be as it was always intended to be, highly favorable in the presence of the Almighty.

Everything will *seem* as it was always meant to be! Like the Son of God!

This is the purpose of the eons.

Let us exult in the expectation of the glory of God!

APPENDIX

ABBREVIATIONS OF SCRIPTURE VERSIONS

The following list represents Scripture versions that may have been referenced in this book.

Primary: versions referenced most frequently

ALT	Analytical-Literal Translation (2001)
ASV	American Standard Version (1901)
CV	Concordant Version (1926, 1983)
KJV	King James Version
NASB	New American Standard Bible (1960, 2002)
REB	Rotherham's Emphasized Bible (1959, 1994)
WNT	Weymouth's New Testament in Modern Speech (1912)
YLT	Young's Literal Translation of the Holy Bible (1898)

Secondary: versions referenced less frequently, perhaps only once

BBE	Bible in Basic English (1965)
BTCB	Bullinger's The Companion Bible (1922)
CEV	Contemporary English Version
CJB	Complete Jewish Bible (1998)
DNT	Darby New Translation (1899)
ESV	English Standard Version (2001)
GB	Geneva Bible (1599)
GW	God's Word
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible
HNV	Hebrew Names Bible
ISV	International Standard Version
JBP	Phillips' The New Testament in Modern English (1958)
JMT	James Moffatt Translation
JPS	Jewish Publication Society Bible (1917)
LITV	Literal Translation of the Holy Bible (1976, 2001)
MKJV	Modern King James Version (1962, 1998)
MNT	Murdock's New Testament
NIV	New International Version (1973, 1984)
NKJV	New King James Version (1979, 1999)
TCNT	Twentieth Century New Testament (1904)
TSS	The Sacred Scriptures (1981)
TT	Tyndale's Translation (1530)
WAET	Wuest's The New Testament—An Expanded Translation (1961)
WEB	Webster Bible (1833)

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