

4. THE WORD OF HIS GRACE

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 renaissance 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.

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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 renascence 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 *selflessness*. 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!