

THE GOD OF GRACE
PRESENTED BY
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IN EPHESIANS 2:8,9 WE READ TWO OF THE MOST PRECIOUS VERSES IN ALL OF GOD'S WORD. "FOR BY GRACE ARE WE SAVED THROUGH FAITH; AND THAT NOT OF OURSELVES; IT IS THE GIFT OF GOD; NOT OF WORKS, LEST ANY MAN SHOULD BOAST." HOW WONDERFUL IS THE GRACE OF GOD, AND IT IS TO THAT GRACE THAT WE WISH TO DIRECT OUR ATTENTION TONIGHT. IN THE LESSON WE ARE NOT GOING TO SAY ANYTHING ABOUT THE CONDITIONS THAT MAN MUST MEET IN ORDER TO RECEIVE THE SALVATION THAT GOD HAS GIVEN THROUGH AND BY HIS GRACE.

THERE ARE TWO REASONS FOR WHICH THESE CONDITIONS MIGHT BE MENTIONED. ONE OF THEM IS A PERFECTLY LEGITIMATE REASON AND THAT IS TO FILL A VACUUM THAT HAS BEEN LEFT IN THE TEACHING OF SOME WHO SAY THAT MAN CANNOT DO ANYTHING TO RECEIVE SALVATION OR ELSE HE IS EARNING IT. TO INDICATE THAT MAN IS NOT SAVED WITHOUT HAVING MET CERTAIN CONDITIONS IS CERTAINLY NECESSARY. WE OUGHT TO EMPHASIZE THIS. WE COULD EMPHASIZE IT SIMPLY TO SHOW THAT MAN MUST MEET CONDITIONS OR ELSE WE HAVE UNIVERSAL SALVATION. TITUS 2:11 SAYS, "FOR THE GRACE OF GOD THAT BRINGETH SALVATION HATH APPEARED TO ALL MEN," AND IF THE GRACE OF GOD HAS APPEARED TO ALL MEN AND YOU ARE SAVED WITHOUT MEETING CERTAIN CONDITIONS, THEN ALL MEN ARE GOING TO BE SAVED. THIS OBVIOUSLY CONTRADICTS THE TEACHING OF JESUS IN MATTHEW 7:13,14 WHERE HE DESCRIBED THE NARROW WAY AND THE BROAD WAY AND CONCERNING THE NARROW WAY HE SAID, "FEW THERE BE WHO GO IN THERE AT." IF FEW WERE GOING TO ENTER INTO THE NARROW WAY THAT LEADS TO LIFE, THEN IT IS OBVIOUS THAT ALL MEN WILL NOT BE SAVED, AND, IF IT IS OBVIOUS THAT ALL MEN WILL NOT BE SAVED, THEN IT IS ALSO OBVIOUS THAT MEN MUST MEET CERTAIN CONDITIONS TO BE SAVED BY GRACE SINCE GRACE HAS APPEARED TO ALL MEN.

ANOTHER REASON THAT THESE CONDITIONS MIGHT BE MENTIONED AND EMPHASIZED—AND I FEAR SO OFTEN THIS IS THE CASE—IS SIMPLY TO REMIND GOD THAT AFTER ALL WE ARE PRETTY GOOD FELLOWS AND TO SAY IN EFFECT THAT WHILE WE PAY LIP SERVICE TO THE GRACE OF GOD WE WANT TO LEAVE SOME ROOM SOMEWHERE TO STAND BEFORE GOD IN THE FINAL DAY OF JUDGMENT AND SAY, "LORD, IT LOOKS LIKE YOU OWE ME SOMETHING BECAUSE I HAVE BEEN BAPTIZED AND I HAVE DONE THIS AND I HAVE DONE THE OTHER THING."

WHAT WE WANT TO EMPHASIZE TONIGHT IS WHAT JESUS TAUGHT IN LUKE 17:10. "SO THEN AFTER WE HAVE DONE ALL THAT IS COMMANDED US WE OUGHT TO SAY WE ARE UNPROFITABLE SERVANTS." EVEN AFTER WE HAVE BEEN OBEDIENT TO THE CONDITIONS OF SALVATION, EVEN AFTER WE HAVE DONE THOSE THINGS THAT GOD WOULD REQUIRE OF US IN ORDER TO RECEIVE THAT SALVATION, WE ARE STILL SAVED BY THE GRACE OF GOD. WHAT WE WANT TO EMPHASIZE TONIGHT IS THAT THE BASIS OF OUR SALVATION IS TOTALLY OF GOD THROUGH JESUS CHRIST HIS SON.

THE CONCEPT OF GRACE IS AN IMPORTANT CONCEPT IN THE WORD OF GOD. WHEN THE APOSTLE WOULD SEEK TO PRONOUNCE A BENEDICTION UPON THOSE TO WHOM HE WROTE HE COULD THINK OF NOTHING BETTER TO SAY THAN "THE GRACE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST BE WITH YOU." WHEN THE WRITERS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT WANTED TO SUM UP THE NEW TESTAMENT IN A WORD, THEY COULD FIND NO BETTER EXPRESSION TO DESCRIBE IT THAN TO CALL IT THE "WORD OF GRACE" OR "THE GOSPEL OF THE GRACE OF GOD." WHEN THEY WANTED TO SPEAK OF THE LOVE OF GOD, THEY COULD FIND NO BETTER WAY TO DESCRIBE IT THAN TO SAY IT IS "THE EXCEEDING RICHES OF HIS GRACE." WHEN THEY WANTED TO SPEAK OF THE SALVATION OF MAN, THEY COULD FIND NO BETTER EXPRESSION THAN TO SPEAK OF IT AS "THE GLORY OF HIS GRACE WHEREIN HE HATH MADE US ACCEPTED IN THE BELOVED." AND WHEN HE WANTED TO CONTRAST THE WEAKNESS OF MAN WITH THE

STRENGTH THAT GOD ALONE CAN GIVE, HE COULD FIND NO BETTER LANGUAGE THAN THESE WORDS, "MY GRACE IS SUFFICIENT FOR THEE."

SOMEONE HAS SAID THAT GRACE IS A SHORTHAND WORD FOR THE STUPENDOUS LOVE STORY OF GOD FOR MAN. AND WHILE IN ONE VEIN OF THOUGHT THIS MIGHT BE TRUE WE NEED TO UNDERSTAND THAT GRACE IS A GREAT DEAL MORE THAN LOVE. LOVE IS LESS THAN GRACE AND GRACE IS MORE THAN LOVE. ALL GRACE HAS LOVE IN IT, BUT ALL LOVE IS NOT GRACE. FOR INSTANCE, I LOVE GOD, BUT YOU SEE GOD DESERVES LOVE, AND WHEN I LOVE HIM WHO DESERVES TO BE LOVED THEN THE THOUGHT OF GRACE IS EXCLUDED. I OUGHT TO LOVE MY NEIGHBOR. WHEN I USE THE WORD "OUGHT," I IMMEDIATELY ELIMINATE THE POSSIBILITY OF ITS BEING GRACE, FOR THE WORD "OUGHT" SPEAKS OF DUTY AND WHERE DUTY BINDS US TO LOVE, THEN GRACE IS EXCLUDED. WE LOOK AT THE LOVE A MOTHER HAS FOR HER CHILD, AND IT IS INDEED A MARVELOUS LOVE, BUT TO BE LOVED BY HER WHO BORE HIM IS THE RIGHT OF A CHILD AND THEREFORE, EVEN MOTHER LOVE, AS MARVELOUS AS IT IS, IS LESS THAN GRACE. GRACE IS LOVE THAT IS NOT DUE TO US. GRACE IS LOVE TO WHICH WE HAVE NO MANNER OF CLAIM. GRACE IS LOVE WHICH WE HAVE IN NO WAY EARNED OR DESERVED. GRACE IS LOVE WHICH THE HEART GIVES OUT OF PURE GOODNESS AND LAVISHES ON THE UNWORTHY. GRACE IS THAT LOVE WHICH IS DIRECTED TOWARD THE INDIVIDUAL WHO IS UNLOVEABLE AND WHO DESERVES NOT TO BE LOVED INSTEAD OF DESERVING TO BE LOVED. WE MIGHT ILLUSTRATE IT THIS WAY. WE MIGHT USE A CRIMINAL WHO GOES AND COMMITS A CRIME. LET US SAY THAT HE ROBS HIS BEST FRIEND, AND WHEN THE CRIMINAL IS APPREHENDED AND BROUGHT BEFORE THE JUDGE IF THE BEST WERE TO COME IN AND SAY TO THE JUDGE, "I WANT YOU TO BE MERCIFUL TO HIM," THAT WOULD BE A MARVELOUS KINDNESS, BUT IT WOULD NOT BE GRACE. IF, GOING BEYOND THIS, THE FRIEND (THE WRONGED ONE) WERE TO SAY, "I LOVE THIS INDIVIDUAL, WHO HAS WRONGED ME," THIS WOULD BE LOVE, BUT STILL IT WOULD BE SHORT OF GRACE. GRACE OCCURS WHEN THE ONE WHO HAS BEEN WRONGED COMES BEFORE THE JUDGE AND SAYS TO THE JUDGE, "I DO NOT ASK THAT THIS LAW BE SET ASIDE. THE LAW IS RIGHTEOUS AND THE LAW HAS BEEN BROKEN AND THE PENALTY MUST BE PAID. WHAT I ASK IS THAT THE PENALTY BE INFLICTED UPON ME." WHEN THE ONE WHO HAS BEEN WRONGED IS WILLING TO RECEIVE THE PENALTY UPON HIMSELF THAT THE ONE WHO HAS COMMITTED THE CRIME MAY GO FREE, THEN WE HAVE AN ILLUSTRATION OF THAT WHICH MAY BE CALLED GRACE.

I THINK ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT STATEMENTS THAT WE FIND IN THE TEXT READ A MOMENT AGO FROM EPHESIANS 2:8,9 IS THE FACT THAT THIS GRACE IS THE GIFT OF GOD. IT IS SOMETHING THAT GOD HAS GIVEN AND THIS IMMEDIATELY SAYS TO US THAT JESUS CHRIST WAS INDEED WHAT HE CLAIMED TO BE, THAT HE WAS GOD INCARNATE, THAT HE WAS IMMANUEL, GOD WITH US IN THE FLESH, FOR IF THIS WERE NOT THE CASE AND IF JESUS CHRIST WERE MERELY A GOOD MAN, THEN THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS THE GRACE OF GOD. IF ANY MAN, NO MATTER HOW ELEVATED HIS CHARACTER, NO MATTER HOW PURE HIS LIFE, IF ANY MAN, IF ANY CREATED BEING SHORT OF GOD COULD WORK IN SUCH A WAY TO PROCURE THE GRACE OF GOD, IT IS NO LONGER A GIFT AND THIS IS A CONTRADICTION IN IDEAS AS WELL AS TERMS. WE HAVE NO LONGER GOD GIVING BUT WE HAVE MAN PROCURING. JESUS CHRIST WAS INDEED GOD AND IT WAS GOD THE FATHER GIVING AND IT WAS THE GOD THE SON DYING, AND BECAUSE IT WAS GOD DYING, IT WAS GOD GIVING AND WE HAVE THE GRACE OF ALMIGHTY GOD. IF JESUS CHRIST WERE MERELY MAN THEN WE DO NOT FIND GOD RECONCILING IN CHRIST. WE FIND AT THE VERY MOST GOD RECONCILING THROUGH CHRIST AND GOD IS REDUCED TO MAN AND THE GRACE OF GOD IS ELIMINATED.

THAT A SINNER CANNOT BE JUSTIFIED BY HIS OWN WORKS CAN BE INFERRED SIMPLY FROM THE FACT OF HIS GUILT WHEN WE VIEW THE GUILT OF THE SINNER IN CONNECTION WITH THE NATURE OF LAW, FOR LAW, BY ITS VERY NATURE, CAN ONLY CONDEMN THE WICKED AND PRAISE THE RIGHTEOUS. BUT IN THE SIGHT OF ALMIGHTY GOD, "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NO NOT ONE" FOR "WE HAVE ALL SINNED AND COME SHORT OF THE GLORY OF GOD." WHILE WE OUGHT TO BE ABLE TO INFER

THAT NO MAN CAN BE SAVED BY LAW, THAT NO MAN CAN BE SAVED BY HIS OWN MERIT OR HIS OWN DESSERTS FROM THE INFERENCES WE GAIN SIMPLY FROM THE NATURE OF LAW AND GUILT, WE DON'T HAVE TO DEPEND UPON THIS FOR WHEN WE TURN TO OTHER PASSAGES OF SCRIPTURE WE FIND THAT SUCH STATEMENTS ARE DEFINITELY MADE. FOR INSTANCE, GALATIANS 3:10: "FOR AS MANY AS ARE OF THE WORKS OF THE LAW ARE UNDER THE CURSE: FOR IT IS WRITTEN, CURSED IS EVERY ONE THAT CONTINUETH NOT IN ALL THINGS WHICH ARE WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF THE LAW TO DO THEM." JAMES 2:10,11, "FOR WHOSOEVER SHALL KEEP THE WHOLE LAW, AND YET OFFEND IN ONE POINT, HE IS GUILTY OF ALL. FOR HE THAT SAID, DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, SAID, ALSO, DO NOT KILL. NOW IF THOU COMMIT NO ADULTERY, YET IF THOU KILL, THOU ART BECOME A TRANSGRESSOR OF THE LAW." ROMANS 1:18, "FOR THE WRATH OF GOD IS REVEALED FROM HEAVEN AGAINST ALL UNGODLINESS AND UNRIGHTEOUSNESS OF MEN, WHO HOLD THE TRUTH IN UNRIGHTEOUSNESS." ROMANS 3:19,20, "NOW WE KNOW THAT WHAT THINGS SOEVER THE LAW SAITH, IT SAITH TO THEM WHO ARE UNDER THE LAW: THAT EVERY MOUTH MAY BE STOPPED, AND ALL THE WORLD MAY BECOME GUILTY BEFORE GOD. THEREFORE (WE REACH A CONCLUSION) BY THE DEEDS OF THE LAW THERE SHALL NO FLESH BE JUSTIFIED IN HIS SIGHT: FOR BY THE LAW IS THE KNOWLEDGE OF SIN." IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO FIND A PLAINER STATEMENT THAN THAT--"THEREFORE BY THE DEEDS OF THE LAW THERE SHALL NO FLESH BE JUSTIFIED IN HIS SIGHT." FINALLY GALATIANS 3:21, "IS THE LAW THEN AGAINST THE PROMISES OF GOD? GOD FORBID: FOR IF THERE HAD BEEN A LAW GIVEN WHICH COULD HAVE GIVEN LIFE, VERILY RIGHTEOUSNESS SHOULD HAVE BEEN BY THE LAW." THE CONCLUSION HERE FROM THE CONTEXT IS THAT NO SUCH LAW HAS BEEN GIVEN, AND THEREFORE THERE IS NO RIGHTEOUSNESS THAT COMES BY THE OBSERVANCE OF LAW.

NOW THESE PASSAGES ARE QUITE PLAIN ON THREE POINTS: 1) THESE PASSAGES TELL US THAT WHEREVER SIN EXISTS THERE CAN BE NO SUCH THING AS SALVATION BY MERIT. THIS DOES NOT MEAN SIN AS THE WORLD LOOKS UPON IT BUT AS GOD DEFINES IT. 2) SIN EXISTS WHEREVER THERE IS NOT PERFECT OBEDIENCE TO GOD'S LAW. IF A MAN COULD PERFECTLY OBEY THE LAW, IF A MAN COULD LIVE IN SUCH A WAY THAT HE NEVER VIOLATED THE LAW OF GOD, THEN HE WOULD HAVE WHEREOF TO BOAST AND HE COULD STAND IN FRONT OF GOD IN THE DAY OF JUDGMENT AND SAY, "GOD YOU CAN'T CONDEMN ME FOR SINNING BECAUSE I NEVER SINNED." 3) THERE IS NO PERFECT OBEDIENCE AMONG MEN, FOR ALL HAVE SINNED AND COME SHORT OF THE GLORY OF GOD. NOW IF ALL MEN HAVE SINNED AND WHEREVER SIN EXISTS THERE CAN BE NO SALVATION BY MERIT, IT SIMPLY SAYS THAT THERE IS NO MAN ANYWHERE WHO IS GOING TO BE SAVED UPON HIS OWN MERITS AND HIS JUST DESSERTS.

NOW THIS IS HARD LANGUAGE FOR A WORLD SUCH AS OURS, FOR WE LIVE IN A SELF-SUFFICIENT WORLD. WE LIVE IN A WORLD THAT BELIEVES IT CAN DO ANYTHING THAT NEEDS TO BE DONE AND HAS THE CAPACITY TO PERFORM ANYTHING THAT CAN EVEN BE DREAMED OF, AND TO SAY TO SUCH A SELF-SUFFICIENT WORLD, "HERE IS SOMETHING YOU CANNOT DO," IS A HARD SAYING. BUT IT IS NOT A HARD SAYING FOR ONE WHO HAS BEEN AT THE FOOT OF THE CROSS. IT IS NOT A HARD SAYING FOR ONE WHO HAS SEEN THERE THE LIGHT AND WHO HAS FELT THE BURDEN OF HIS SIN ROLLED AWAY. IT IS NOT A HARD SAYING FOR ONE WHO KNOWS THE MEANING OF THE STATEMENT, "THE GRACE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST" AND IT IS NOT A HARD SAYING FOR A MAN WHO KNOWS THE DEEP MEANING OF THE STATEMENT, "HE LOVED ME AND GAVE HIMSELF FOR ME." IT IS NOT A HARD STATEMENT FOR ONE WHO CAN SING, "NOTHING IN MY HAND I BRING, SIMPLY TO THY CROSS I CLING." AND AGAIN, "NOTHING CAN FOR SIN ATONE, THOU MUST SAVE AND THOU ALONE." THIS I BELIEVE IS THE VERY HEART OF THE "GOSPEL OF THE GRACE OF GOD" THAT SAYS UNTO US THAT THE ONLY THING THAT CAN EVER COME BY MERIT IS CONDEMNATION, BUT SALVATION IS BY THE GRACE OF GOD, THAT SAYS TO US THAT CONDEMNATION IS EARNED BY MAN, BUT SALVATION IS GIVEN BY GOD, ROMANS 6:23 DECLARES THIS UNTO US IN PLAIN LANGUAGE, "FOR THE WAGES (THERE'S WHAT YOU EARN) OF SIN IS DEATH; BUT THE GIFT OF GOD IS ETERNAL LIFE, THROUGH JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD."

WHEN WE REALIZE THIS, DARE WE TO PRESUME TO GO INTO THE PRESENCE OF GOD STANDING UPON OUR OWN MERIT AND DEMANDING TO RECEIVE THOSE THINGS WHICH WE HAVE EARNED AND WHICH ARE OUR JUST REWARD. THE APOSTLE PAUL SAID HE TRIED IT. THE APOSTLE SAID HE TRIED IT AND HE EXPRESSED THE RESULT OF HIS EXPERIMENT IN THIS LANGUAGE, "O WRETCHED MAN THAT I AM WHO SHALL DELIVER ME FROM THE BODY OF THIS DEATH." THE APOSTLE PAUL SAID HE TRIED IT AND YOU READ ROMANS 7 AND ALMOST THE ENTIRE CHAPTER IS A MONUMENT PENNED BY THE APOSTLE PAUL TO COLOSSAL FAILURE OF HIS EFFORT.

WE MAY FORGET OUR PREDICAMENT FROM TIME TO TIME. WE MAY FORGET OUR PREDICAMENT PARTICULARLY IF WE ARE WILLING TO SIMPLY LIVE UPON THE SURFACE OF LIFE. WE MAY FORGET OUR PREDICAMENT IF WE ARE WILLING TO BE MORALLY BLIND, BUT WHEN WE OPEN OUR EYES AND WHEN, HAVING OPENED OUR EYES, WE CATCH A TERRIFYING GLIMPSE OF THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD WE MAY DESPAIR. WE TRY TO ESCAPE; WE TRY TO BALANCE THE GOOD IN OUR LIVES OVER AGAINST THE EVIL; WE MAKE US A LEDGER SHEET AND FOR EVERYTHING ON THE NEGATIVE SIDE WE TRY TO HAVE SOMETHING OVER ON THE POSITIVE SIDE AND SOMEHOW WE FEEL IF WE CAN JUST GET ONE MORE ENTRY ON THE POSITIVE SIDE OF THE LEDGER THAT GOD IS GOING TO BE OBLIGATED TO ADMIT US IN THE FINAL DAY. WE GIVE TITHES OF ALL THAT WE POSSESS, AND WE POINT TO OUR EFFORTS AS SOCIAL WORKERS AND ALL OF THE GOOD THINGS THAT WE ARE DOING, BUT THE ONLY THING THAT WE ARE INDEED TRYING TO DO IS TO FORGET THE TERRIBLE GUILT OF THE HEART THAT CAN ONLY BE REMOVED BY THE GRACE OF GOD.

SOMETIMES WHEN WE BEGIN TO THINK OF IT WE MAY DESPAIR TO THE POINT THAT WE BELIEVE THE STRUGGLE IS HOPELESS. WE MAY BELIEVE THAT A MAN IS DOOMED TO WRETCHEDNESS, BUT SUCH IS NOT THE CASE. NOT ONLY DID THE APOSTLE PAUL ASK THE QUESTION, "OH, WRETCHED MAN THAT I AM! WHO SHALL DELIVER ME FROM THE BODY OF THIS DEATH?" BUT HE RESPONDED WITH A CRY OF FAITH, "I THANK GOD THROUGH JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD." IN ESSENCE WHAT HE SAID WAS THAT GOD HAS RECEIVED US, NOT BECAUSE HE HAS BEEN MADE TO RECEIVE US, NOT BECAUSE MEN HAVE STORMED THE GATES OF HEAVEN WITH THEIR GOODNESS AND GOD HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO OPEN THEM AND LET MAN COME IN, BUT GOD HAS CHOSEN OF HIS OWN FREE WILL AND BECAUSE HE LOVED US TO RECEIVE US IN JESUS CHRIST. WHAT WE NEED TO LEARN IS THAT IT WAS GOD'S ACT AND NOT OURS. IT WAS GOD'S LOVE AND NOT OUR GOODNESS. IT WAS GOD'S GRACE AND NOT OUR MERIT, AND BECAUSE OF GOD'S GOODNESS AND GOD'S GRACE, GOD'S MERCY AND GOD'S LOVE, WE MAY SAY WITH THE APOSTLE PAUL IN ROMANS 8, "IF GOD BE FOR US, WHO CAN BE AGAINST US? HE THAT SPARED NOT HIS OWN SON, BUT DELIVERED HIM UP FOR US ALL, HOW SHALL HE NOT WITH HIM ALSO FREELY GIVE US ALL THINGS? WHO SHALL LAY ANYTHING TO THE CHARGE OF GOD'S ELECT? IT IS GOD THAT JUSTIFIETH. WHO IS HE THAT CONDEMNETH?" WHAT PAUL IS DOING HERE IS SIMPLY APPEALING TO THE ACTS OF GOD AND HE IS SAYING TO THE ROMANS TO WHOM HE WROTE AND HE IS SAYING TO HIMSELF AND HE IS SAYING TO YOU AND TO ME THAT WHEN WE APPEAL BEYOND THE GOODNESS OF MAN, WHEN WE APPEAL UNTO THE ACT OF GOD'S GRACE, IT CAN STEEL US AGAINST EVERY CHARGE BECAUSE WE STAND PROTECTED UNDER THE WINGS OF THE ALMIGHTY. IT CAN ENABLE US TO FACE THE UNJUST CONDEMNATION OF MEN. WHO SHALL LAY ANYTHING TO THE CHARGE OF GOD'S ELECT? IF WE CAN REST ASSURED IN THE KNOWLEDGE THAT GOD HAS CHOSEN US IN JESUS CHRIST, THEN WHAT CARE WE FOR THE ONSLAUGHT OF MEN WHEN THEY UNJUSTLY CRITICISE US AND CONDEMN US?

BUT THERE IS MORE THAN THAT FOR NOT ONLY CAN APPEALING TO GOD STEEL US AGAINST THE UNJUST CHARGES OF MEN, BUT APPEALING TO THE ACT OF GOD CAN ALSO STEEL US AGAINST THOSE CHARGES OF MEN THAT ARE JUST. LOOK AT THE APOSTLE PETER. IN HOW MANY SOCIETIES COULD PETER HAVE BEEN RECEIVED BACK AFTER HAVING PLAYED THE TRAITOR? IN HOW MANY SOCIETIES COULD THE APOSTLE PETER HAVE GONE DOWN AS A GREAT MAN WHEN HE HAD DENIED THE FOUNDER OF HIS COUNTRY, SO TO SPEAK? BENEDICT ARNOLD IS NOT A GREAT MAN IN AMERICAN HISTORY. QUISLING IS NOT A MAN LOOKED UPON AS BEING A MARVELOUS EXAMPLE OF PATRIOTISM. BUT PETER IS LOOKED UPON AS BEING A MAN OF

FAITH. WHY? BECAUSE HE COULD APPEAL BEYOND THE CONSIDERATION OF MEN. TO THE GRACE OF GOD. THERE ARE SOME THINGS IN THE LIVES OF MEN THAT OTHER MEN SEEM UNABLE TO FORGIVE, AND THEN THERE MAY BE SOME THINGS IN OUR LIVES WHICH WE ARE UNABLE TO FORGIVE OURSELVES, AND THE ONLY THING THAT CAN GIVE US STRENGTH TO ENDURE IS TO LOOK BEYOND THE SINS TO THE GRACE OF GOD AND TO REST ASSURED IN THE FACT THAT GOD HAS FORGIVEN AND GOD HAS RECEIVED US IN JESUS CHRIST.

THIS IS WHY THE APOSTLE PAUL GLORIED IN THE CROSS OF CHRIST. HE COULD NOT BOAST OF WHAT HE HAD DONE, BUT HE COULD BOAST OF THE CROSS AND HE COULD BOAST OF WHAT GOD HAD DONE. WHEN WE TAKE OUR STAND, NOT IN WHAT WE CONSIDER TO BE THE SUNSHINE OF MAN'S MERIT, BUT WHEN WE TAKE OUR STAND IN THE SHADOW OF THE CROSS OF JESUS CHRIST, WE ARE IN GOD'S FAVOR, WE ARE IN GOD'S CARE, WE ARE IN GOD'S KEEPING. WE ARE SAFE AND WE DO NOT NEED TO FEAR ANY CHALLENGE OF MAN. WE CAN SAY WITH THE WRITER OF OLD, "THE ETERNAL GOD IS THEIR REFUGE AND UNDERNEATH ARE THE EVERLASTING ARMS." WELL DO WE SING THAT GREAT HYMN OF FAITH.

"BENEATH THE CROSS OF JESUS
I FAIR WOULD TAKE MY STAND,
THE SHADOW OF A MIGHTY ROCK
WITHIN A WEARY LAND,
A HOME WITHIN THE WILDERNESS,
A REST UPON THE WAY,
FROM THE BURNING OF THE NOON-TIDE HEAT,
AND THE BURDEN OF THE DAY."

—ELIZABETH CLEPHANE

HOW GREAT IS THE GRACE OF GOD. WHY, OH WHY, MUST IT BE ONE OF THE HARDEST THINGS FOR MAN TO ACCEPT? WHY, OH WHY, MUST THE GRACE OF GOD BE ONE OF THE HARDEST LESSONS FOR MAN TO LEARN? WE LOOK AT THE TEACHING OF THE APOSTLE PAUL AND IT IS NOT LONG UNTIL WE DISCOVER THAT THE GREATEST BATTLES OF PAUL'S PREACHING WERE FOUGHT AGAINST JUDAIZING TEACHERS WHO WERE NOT WILLING TO REST CONTENT IN THE GRACE OF GOD. WE LOOK BACK AT PAUL ON ONE HAND AND WE LOOK AT THE JUDAIZING TEACHERS ON THE OTHER, AND WE MAY SAY THAT THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THEM WAS SMALL. FOR INSTANCE, IF WE COMPARE THEIR TEACHING WE CAN SAY THAT THE JUDAIZING TEACHERS BELIEVED WITH PAUL THAT JESUS WAS THE MESSIAH. THERE WAS NO QUESTION IN THEIR MINDS ABOUT THAT. THEY DID NOT OBJECT TO THE HIGH OPINION THAT THE APOSTLE PAUL HAD OF JESUS CHRIST, THE SON OF GOD. THEY BELIEVED WITH THE APOSTLE PAUL THAT JESUS CHRIST HAD BEEN RAISED FROM THE DEAD. THEY DID NOT DOUBT THE FACT OF THE RESURRECTION. THEY BELIEVED IT TO BE SO. THEY BELIEVED WITH THE APOSTLE PAUL THAT FAITH IN CHRIST WAS NECESSARY TO SALVATION. BUT THE PROBLEM WAS THEY ALSO BELIEVED SOMETHING ELSE. THEY BELIEVED THAT WHAT CHRIST HAD DONE WAS NOT SUFFICIENT AND THAT IN ADDITION TO FOLLOWING CHRIST A MAN HAD TO GO BACK AND KEEP THE LAW IN ORDER TO BE SAVED. IF THE APOSTLE PAUL WERE LIVING TODAY THOSE WHO OBSERVED THE SITUATION AND OBSERVED THE SMALL SEPARATION (AT LEAST SEEMINGLY SMALL) THAT EXISTED BETWEEN PAUL AND THE JUDAIZING TEACHERS WOULD ASK PAUL, TO JUST OVERLOOK IT. "AFTER ALL, THIS IS THE PERIOD OF ECUMENICITY, THIS IS THE PERIOD WHEN MEN ARE TRYING TO GET TOGETHER, AND LOOK AT THE GREAT AREAS OF AGREEMENT. YOU BELIEVE HE IS THE MESSIAH, SO DO THEY. YOU BELIEVE HE WAS RAISED FROM THE DEAD, SO DO THEY. YOU BELIEVE FAITH IS NECESSARY, SO DO THEY. JUST FORGET THE DIFFERENCE AND JOIN TOGETHER IN JESUS CHRIST."

BUT PAUL DID NOT OVERLOOK IT THEN AND PAUL WOULD NOT OVERLOOK IT NOW, FOR HE REALIZED THAT THE DIFFERENCE WHICH EXISTED BETWEEN HIM AND THE JUDAIZING TEACHERS WAS NOT SOMETHING SMALL AND INSIGNIFICANT. IT WAS SOMETHING THAT STRUCK AT THE VERY HEART AND CORE OF CHRISTIANITY. IT WAS SOMETHING THAT ATTACKED THE FOUNDATION OF THE FAITH. NOW THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THEM WAS EXACTLY THIS—THE JUDAIZING TEACHERS BELIEVED THAT THEY COULD BE SAVED BY

KEEPING THE LAW AND PAUL BELIEVED THAT MAN WAS SAVED BY THE FULL AND FREE GIFT OF JESUS CHRIST UPON CALVARY'S TREE. PAUL WAS CONTENDING THAT THE GALATIANS COULD COME "JUST AS I AM WITHOUT ONE PLEA, BUT THAT THY BLOOD WAS SHED FOR ME," AND THE APOSTLE PAUL REALIZED THAT IF THESE GALATIANS OR ANYBODY ELSE COULD NOT SO COME WITH A FULL FAITH TRUSTING IN THE SACRIFICE OF JESUS CHRIST THAT THE WORLD DID NOT HAVE ANY CHRISTIANITY YET BECAUSE THE WORLD DID NOT HAVE ANY SUFFICIENT CHRIST. ALL THE WORLD HAD WAS A REFINED JUDAISM WHICH WAS SOMETHING IN ADDITION TO KEEPING THE MOSAIC LAW.

ANY MAN, I CARE NOT WHO HE MAY BE NOR DO I CARE WHERE OR WHEN HE MAY LIVE, WHO THINKS HE HAS EARNED A PASSING GRADE WITH GOD, WITH EMPHASIS UPON THE WORD "EARNED," SIMPLY HAS NOT SEEN THE GOD OF THE BIBLE. HE HAS NOT SEEN THE GOD "HIGH AND LIFTED UP" WHICH ISAIAH SAW. HE HAS NOT SEEN THE GOD THAT ISAIAH SAW WHICH MOVED HIM TO PROCLAIM, "WOE IS ME! FOR I AM UNDONE--MINE EYES HAVE SEEN THE LORD, JEHOVAH OF HOSTS." THE CLOSER WE COME TO VISIONS OF GOD, THE CLOSER WE COME TO THE VISIONS OF OUR UNHOLINESS AND OUR OWN UNWORTHINESS AND THE NEED FOR OUR COMPLETE DEPENDANCE UPON THE GIFT OF GOD IN JESUS CHRIST HIS SON. WHEN WE LOSE SIGHT OF GOD, WE CEASE TO PRAY, "LORD, MAKE ME TO BECOME MORE LIKE THEE," AND WE BEGIN TO PRAY, "LORD, I THANK THEE THAT I AM NOT AS OTHER MEN." WE MUST DEPEND UPON THE GRACE OF GOD FOR ONLY BY GOD'S GRACE CAN WE STAND ACCEPTED IN HIS SIGHT. THANKS BE UNTO GOD FOR HIS UNSPEAKABLE GIFT WHEREBY HE HAS MADE US ACCEPTED IN THE BELOVED.

BUT SOME MEN LOOK AT THE GRACE, THEY LOOK AT GOD AND SAY, "BUT, I HAVE DONE THINGS, I HAVE THOUGHT THINGS, AND I HAVE SAID THINGS WHICH HAVE CARRIED ME AWAY TO SUCH A DEGREE THAT I CAN'T EVEN BE SAVED BY THE GRACE OF GOD." THE ANSWER OF THE CHRISTIAN, THE ANSWER OF THAT ONE WHO KNOWS THE GRACE OF GOD, THE ANSWER OF THAT ONE WHO HAS BEEN SAVED BY THE GRACE OF GOD IS SIMPLY, "LOOK AT JESUS CHRIST." LOOK AT JESUS CHRIST UPON THE CROSS SAYING, "FATHER, FORGIVE THEM FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO." LOOK AT JESUS CHRIST SAYING, "NOT UNTIL 7 TIMES, BUT UNTIL 70 TIMES 7." LOOK AT JESUS CHRIST WEeping OVER JERUSALEM AND SAYING, "HOW OFTEN WOULD I HAVE GATHERED THY CHILDREN UNDER MY WINGS, BUT YE WOULD NOT." NO, THE FAILURE IS NOT WITH GOD. THE FAILURE IS NOT IN ANY INSUFFICIENCY OF GOD'S GIFT OR OF GOD'S GRACE, BUT THE INSUFFICIENCY IS TO BE FOUND SIMPLY IN THE FACT THAT MAN WILL NOT COME AND BOW HIMSELF HUMBLy IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD, BEING OBEDIENT TO GOD'S WILL THAT HE MIGHT GO FORTH SAVED BY GOD'S ETERNAL GRACE.

LISTEN TO JESUS CHRIST AND LOOK AT JESUS CHRIST AS HE SAYS, "I CAME NOT TO CALL THE RIGHTEOUS BUT SINNERS TO REPENTANCE; AND HIM THAT COMETH UNTO ME I WILL IN NO WISE CAST OUT." IF YOU, WHATEVER YOUR SIN OR YOUR SORROW OR SADNESS MAY BE, IF YOU WOULD COME UNTO JESUS CHRIST TONIGHT BASED UPON FAITH IN HIM AND READY TO RENDER FULL OBEDIENCE TO HIS WILL THAT YOU MIGHT BE SAVED BY HIS MARVELOUS GRACE, THAT IS THE PROMISE OF JESUS CHRIST. "I WON'T CAST YOU OUT." JESUS WILL RECEIVE YOU AND JESUS WILL SAVE YOU TONIGHT.