

Faith And The Christian Fight (Part 10)

Grace's Necessity to Christian Living

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We are going to begin this sermon by turning to a couple of verses that we are very familiar with that will make a good springboard for what I am going to be speaking on this day.

I Corinthians 1:26-29 For you see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, has God chosen, yes, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence.

We all understand that he is speaking about us, and it is not, let us say, to our merit to be called all the humbling things he has called us there, but that is a truthful evaluation of what we are.

I want to clarify something that I feel is quite important as we begin this sermon that is drawn from Hebrews 11. It is that we are not in any way competing against the personalities named in Hebrews 11 in terms of being judged. Some of those things they accomplished through faith can be pretty overwhelming when compared to what we are.

James 2:1-5 My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; and you have respect to him that wears the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit you here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand you there, or Sit here under my footstool: are you not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts? Hearken, my beloved brethren, has not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he has promised to them that love him?

It is a characteristic of human nature to be partial in judgment. One of the most famous lines from Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech was when he stated that he

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looked forward to the time, to the day, when a person would be judged by the contents of his character and not by the color of his skin.

Such things as race, gender, ethnicity, economic level, and type of employment are given close scrutiny in our judgment of others, and in the same manner we also tend to be wary of God's judgment. Human nature's proclivity is to conclude that His judgments will tend to be toward an extreme. He is generally pictured as either very critical and His standards impossibly high, and thus hardly anyone can meet them; or He is characterized as so merciful that there is virtually no standard one has to measure up against, and thus any level of conduct is acceptable.

A clear example of the devastating effect of partiality in judgment and what it can generate begins in Genesis 37:3 by showing that Jacob's attitude toward Joseph was strongly instrumental in moving eleven of his sons to jealousy against Joseph, and of course with, at least at first, disastrous results.

When we consider the instruction that is given in James 2 and James 3, we are then urged by those two chapters to judge as God judges. Now this is impossible because we do not have the scope or the power of His ability to do such a thing, but we are held accountable to start down that path toward that end. In the Bible we are given clear overviews of the foundational building blocks of the manner of His judgments. We will see one of these by lifting this one principle from Jesus:

Luke 12:48 But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.

This statement gives us a brief but an accurate overview of how God judges. He judges everyone personally and individually on the basis of the gifts they have been given, added to a perfect understanding of the time and circumstances they live and operate within. It is because of this that our judgments of other people are almost always going to fall short of perfection. There is no way we can possibly do this perfectly, and therefore, because we must nevertheless evaluate and judge (that is part of our responsibility), we are then urged by Jesus both to seek counsel and to be cautious in our judgment.

John 17:12 While I was with them in the world, I kept them in your name: those that thou gave me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of

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perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled.

John 17:20 Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word;

With that thought in mind of what Jesus said there, I want us to reflect back briefly on Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, and Moses, and their lives. Remember, we are talking about judgment and evaluating. How much of the Bible was written when they lived? I ask that especially, because Jesus said, "I kept them," and in verse 20 He said, "I am praying for those who are going to believe their word"—that is, the word of the apostles.

The Word of God becomes a part of the judging we are to do. So how much of the Word of God was available to Abraham and Sarah, and Enoch, and Abel, and so forth? Well, by the end of the time that the children of Israel reached the Promised Land, at best there were only five books of the Bible. How well they were distributed I do not know, but Moses certainly read them because he wrote them. So except for Moses, all of those people lived before a single word of Scripture ever appeared. God instead operated in a different manner adapted according to their circumstance. Remember, we are talking about judgment, about how God judges.

How does God judge? He judges according to the gifts. Those who are given much are judged harder than those who are given little. If we are going to judge using the word of God, how much did they have? We shall see.

So what did God do in their day? He made personal visits, appearing before them from time to time as needed as His purposes necessitated. Those personal appearances had the potential of having a far greater, quicker, and longer lasting impact upon a person than reading something out of a book that we have to go over again and again and again before we finally get it. His personal appearances to those people were a gift they received that we have not, and therefore it is a part of their judgment, and thus more is expected of them.

The same is true of those Israelites who witnessed the Ten Plagues on Egypt. They witnessed their release from bondage, including the parting of the Red Sea, and a multitude of experiences of their pilgrimage across the wilderness, events we only read about. They literally experienced them. Every day they witnessed the Cloud, the Pillar of fire, and the manna. And in addition, the cultures of those ancients—the ones they lived within and came out of—were different in major ways.

Perhaps above all was God's purpose for Israel as contrasted with His purpose for the church. Israel was a kingdom of this world, and the church is definitely not. They fought bloody wars with other nations of this world. The church is ordered not to participate in this world's affairs, but to follow the example of Jesus by keeping ourselves apart from it while bearing up under what it is forcing on us.

There are thus different factors in place for God's judgment of us and His judgment of them. Because we do not experience things in the same way they did, it takes someone who did watch what they did to evaluate and know exactly what He gave them in the way of gifts to deal with the circumstances of their lives, and so only He can judge.

Tell me something. Do you ever feel guilty that you are not living up to what Abraham did, or what Isaac did, or what Jacob accomplished, or what Noah accomplished? Those men really did wonderful works within the circumstances of their lives. Let us go to the book of Ezekiel. God is the speaker:

Ezekiel 18:4-5 Behold, all souls [all lives] are mine; as the soul [the life] of the father, so also the soul [the life] of the son is mine: the soul that sins, it shall die. But if a man be just, and do that which is lawful and right,

Ezekiel 18:10 If he beget a son that is a robber, a shedder of blood, and that does the like to any one of these things,

Can you see what He is doing here? He is presenting ideas and concepts that have to do with judgment.

Ezekiel 18:13-14 Has given forth upon usury, and has taken increase: shall he then live? He shall not live: he has done all these abominations; he shall surely die; his blood shall be upon him. Now, lo, if he beget a son, that sees all his father's sins which he has done, and considers and does not such like, [he does things differently]

Ezekiel 18:17 That has taken off his hand from the poor, that has not received usury nor increase, has executed my judgments, has walked in my statutes; he shall not die for the iniquity of his father, he shall surely live.

Ezekiel 18:20 The soul that sins, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the

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wicked shall be upon him.

That is one of the most complete statements in the entirety of the Bible showing that God judges each and every person fairly and squarely, and the sins of the father do not pass upon the son or the daughter, or whatever. So, if the son sees the sins of the father and changes, then good for him.

We are going to go to a comprehensive statement in the book of I Peter, and then we are going to come right back to the Old Testament again.

I Peter 1:17 And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judges according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear [or reverence].

Peter is saying that everybody is going to get a fair shake. You are not being measured against Abraham and Isaac, or Jacob, or Moses, or Sarah, or Enoch, or Abel.

In Psalm 98 is a comprehensive single statement. When we read verse 8 you will recognize the context here immediately, because we sing this song often.

Psalm 98:8-9 Let the floods clap their hands: let the hills be joyful together [Why?] before the LOORD [in His presence]; for he comes to judge the earth: with righteousness shall he judge the world, and the people with equity.

The word "equity" means fairness, even-handedness. Everybody is going to be individually judged according to the gifts that they have been given and what they have done with those gifts within the context of their lives, their time, and their cultures.

In addition to that, we have the additional promise that God will never test us above what we are able, but will with the testing always provide us with a way of escape that we will be able to bear it.

I Corinthians 10:13 There has no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that you may be able to bear it.

When we add to these promises that He gives us—the faith that we need, His granting to us repentance and forgiveness, and His Holy Spirit—we are getting a really good deal. We never have to be concerned about being compared to somebody else. It is one-on-one all the time.

I gave you that opening because I did not want you to feel the pressure of the sermons that I have been giving, because those people were really something in terms of their faith.

Hebrews 11:14-16 For they [Abraham and Sarah in this context] that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he has prepared for them a city.

I think at this point it might be good to remind us about the state of affairs of the Hebrew people to whom this epistle was written. In many ways it is similar to ours today.

Hebrews 3:1 Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus;

It is the term "holy brethren." This establishes that Hebrews was not written to the Hebrew world in general, but specifically to Hebrew Christians. They are the only ones that fit that "holy brethren." The epistle further shows that the Hebrew Christians were not going through a bloody persecution. However, if written in the mid 60s, which many researchers think, one was not very far off, at least in Jerusalem, because in 70 AAD the Temple was destroyed and the Romans pretty much ended Jewish culture as it was then.

The Hebrews' problems were in enduring the ever-present influence of the world in a culture that was rapidly deteriorating morally and spiritually. It is helpful to remember the cultural thing, that when the book of Hebrews was written, the Temple and its affairs were still operating, as well as all the religious parties. The Pharisees and the Sadducees were still functioning in community life.

Hebrews 10:32 But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great fight of afflictions;

The author is reflecting back on the time when they were called, which may have been twenty, or maybe even in some cases thirty years before. What was happening to the people was that the affairs and the concerns of the life they had been called out of were strongly beckoning them to come back to its deceptive security. The "holy brethren" had an imbedded and growing spiritual vision and attitude problem. The world was strongly pulling them back toward it. As a group, these Christians were in a state similar to what we would call today "Laodiceanism."

A fairly frequent exhortation to this one that we have just read in Hebrews 10:32, where the author says, "Call to remembrance the former days," when their confidence was really strong and they put up with whatever cultural problems came into their lives and were impacting on them, they endured them. They persevered. They were growing. But now, some time had passed, and what was happening? They were gradually, slowly but surely, drifting back toward the world and becoming weary in well-doing. The attitude was changing. The cultural circumstances in their living environment, combined with the Hebrews' diminishing zeal, were signaling that very serious moral and spiritual consequences lay just ahead for them, and the epistle to the Hebrews was an attempt to head it off and to get the people turned around before it was too late.

Like us, the Hebrew Christians had been called out of the world to follow Christ in a culture that was continually growing in its intense immorality. But the reality was that Christ had not come yet. The Temple was still standing and operating, and what was becoming lost was the fact that they were called to follow Christ to the end of whatever came first, whether it was Christ, or the end of their lives. That should have been understood, for they were baptized and made the covenant with God. But we Israelitish people have the proclivity for forgetting.

The overall theme of Hebrews is described in short by two words: "better than." Those are the two words. Christ is better than angels. Christ is better than Moses. The New Covenant is better than the Old. If you start looking for it, you will see comparisons all the way through the book of Hebrews between what these people were given and what the cultures they had come out of was offering them by them going back to it.

What do you do to match what you have been given as a gift? Do you think this was not impacting on the judgment that they were already receiving—the judgment we can see by whomever it was who wrote the letter, which was very likely the apostle Paul? The absolute truth the apostle Paul wrote Hebrews is not available to us, but it sure looks like the apostle Paul. Here he is, appealing with all of his being, saying, "Brethren, do

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not turn away! What has been given is so much better than anything you had before, and there is so much more better yet to come."

Hebrews 2:1-3 Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him;

This epistle gives much evidence that the Hebrew brethren had allowed worldly distractions and involvement which were, in all likelihood, not sins in themselves, but they were cutting deeply into their lives, and they had lost a clear vision of where they should have been headed, and were drifting away from God's promises.

Let us look again at Hebrews 11, which was expounded in the last sermon.

Hebrews 11:13 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

It is probably saying this of all of the personalities that are mentioned in Hebrews 11, but even if we just include Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, and Jacob, it said that they perceived the promises from afar off, maybe time-wise, and were persuaded and embraced and confessed them. They confessed by the way that they lived their lives.

Verse 14 then goes on to reveal that this combination of conduct and attitude showed that they were seeking a homeland—a new homeland different from the one that they lived in.

Hebrews 11:14 For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country.

Verse 15 continues by showing that they, like you and me, had every opportunity to go back to where and what they were before God called them. Verse 16 then reminds us that because their lives clearly showed where they were headed, that God was not

ashamed to call them His children.

We do those people a disservice by thinking that they lived in a better, quieter time, and that they had less stressful lives than we do, that they had more time to think things through what their choices would be, and have less distractions impacting on them. The thought that they had an advantage over us does a disservice to God and to His creative efforts, first of all thinking that there is favoritism in Him somewhat like Jacob had for Joseph, and secondly, overlooking that these people were being prepared for much higher positions in God's kingdom than us. Remember that Jesus said, "To whom much is given, the much more is required."

Do you think that God, who gave these people personal visits, was not going to make that a part of their judgment because of the impact that it should have had on their lives? It was not just that they believed that God existed, they saw him with their own eyes! In Abraham's and Sarah's case, they even cooked a meal for Him. Can you imagine how long that took? If you read the description, you will read that Abraham went out and selected a living animal. Then they had to slaughter it, they had to bleed it, and then they had to cook it. And what were they doing all the while? You know very well that they were talking!

Would you not like to sit down and talk to God and know that this was God that you were speaking to? Remember now, there is a cost, because God is going to hold that as part of His judgment, because that was a wonderful gift that almost nobody in the history of mankind has had.

How do you think that His testing of Abraham was going to go? Do you think they were not going to be given about the hardest test anybody has ever had to pass through? Are you beginning to get the idea?

It is unfair to think that they lived in an easier time. Oh no, they did not. It just looks like that on the surface. But when we consider other factors, it begins to become clear that God is fair, and he was calling these people to the highest offices in His kingdom, in His family, when it is established under Jesus Christ. His testing of them is going to be equal. It is going to be commensurate with the job He has called them to. Their lives were stressful. They did not get just one test. How did they endure? What enabled these people to meet the tests that they were given?

I have given several sermons on the "Eternal Security" doctrine, and one of the reasons I have done so is because the presentation of that doctrine is so unbalanced and lopsided that it leads people to, at the very least, neglect and sometimes even forget

their responsibilities to God in this covenant that we have made with Him. There should rightfully be a strong sense of trusting hope in God's salvation beating in the breast of every son of God—a hope that is based in the absolutely true faithfulness of God Himself and the promise of His word. But that hope must not be just a wild presumption, but counter-balanced by an awareness of one's own proclivities and weaknesses. This is why I began with I Corinthians 1:26. In God's eyes this is what we are. We are the weak of the world.

I know that anyone of us who thinks on that would be humbled by it. Why in the world should God ever be interested in us? His own Word tells us that He does it on purpose so that nobody will ever be able to glory in His presence. He does that for our benefit. Hopefully that will lead us to trust Him because we recognize that we really are weak.

The wonderfulness of our calling is counter-balanced by a humility that one does not completely know God's will for one's self personally, and does not know how painfully far God is going to test one in a given situation. This counter-balance should be of such measure that it drives the Christian to pray without ceasing in order to remain close to God, because He truly is the source of strength.

That presentation of the "Eternal Security" doctrine is so one-sided it leads people to wrongly assume there is not the slightest danger for them to fall away, and it leads them into a consistent pattern of loose and careless living virtually absent of any discipline according to the measure of the apostle Paul, who said that he beat his body lest he found himself a cast-away. There was concern in him. This concern implied some of the feelings, the emotional content of what Paul was going through at one point of his life. Do you think he did not feel weak? You had better believe that he did. But he made it, did he not? Therein lies the lesson.

So where does one go, or what must one do, in order to have the strength to endure these times, and not only endure these times, but to actually grow within them, thus making the kind of confession the heroes of faith made that moved God to say that He was not ashamed to call them His friend, His children, their God? What I am going to show you is in no way complex to understand, but we are still going to have to discipline ourselves to accomplish our part.

Those of you who have heard my sermons going through Hebrews 11, I want you to recall Isaiah 51:1-2 where God instructs His children to look to Abraham, that he is the rock from whom we are hewn. The book of Genesis shows us a pattern of Abraham, his son, and his grandson, and we are going to look at one of these patterns that is so important that shows how it was that they accomplished what they did. I am going to

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direct you just to look at one word in this next scripture.

Genesis 12:7-8 And the LOORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto your seed will I give this land: and there he built an altar unto the LOORD, who appeared unto him. And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, having Bethel on the west, and Hai on the east: and there he built an altar unto the LOORD, and called upon the name of the LOORD.

Genesis 13:3-4 And he went on his journeys from the south even to Bethel, unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Hai; unto the place of the altar, which he had make there at the first: and there Abram called on the name of the LOORD.

Genesis 13:18 Then Abram removed his tent, and came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre, which is in Hebron, and built there an altar unto the LOORD.

Genesis 26:25 And he [Isaac] built an altar there, and called upon the name of the LOORD, and pitched his tent there: and there Isaac's servants dug a well.

Genesis 33:20 And he [Jacob] erected there an altar, and called it El Elohe Israel.

Genesis 35:3 [Still speaking about Jacob] And let us arise, and go up to Bethel; and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went.

Genesis 35:7 And he built there an altar, and called the place El Bethel: because there God appeared unto him, when he fled from the face of his brother.

The frequent mentions of an altar reveal that, once converted, Abraham's, and Isaac's, and Jacob's relationship with God was at the very top of their concerns in life. An altar symbolizes worship of, allegiance to, and communication with God. It symbolizes the means by which one's devotion to God is most clearly expressed. A helpful ceremonial example to remember is later, when Israel became a nation, Israel was required by God to offer sacrifices before Him twice a day—in the morning and in the evening. Along with these sacrifices, incense was poured on the incense altar within the Holy Place. Do you

understand what that signified?

These commanded ceremonies symbolized a daily program, a formal appearing before Him in prayer and Bible Study, in addition to the other less-formal occasions of communication that are scattered throughout one's daily activities. That is one of the reasons why Paul said, "Pray without ceasing."

We are now going to go back to the book of Hebrews. Let us begin to turn this message toward you and me. We just looked at our father Abraham and what he, and Isaac, and Jacob did. The communication with, and the relationship with God was at the very top of their priorities in life once they became converted and began moving in that direction.

Hebrews 4:16 Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

Abraham's children will do as the "father of the faithful" did. It is this manner and level of conduct that qualifies them to be sons of Abraham, and his devotion was an almost unbroken continuous part of his daily life. This verse introduces another factor of greatest importance to whom and what we are. It is "grace." We are to go before God's throne to find grace. Now why? What is so important about it anyway?

I think there is maybe a casual general misunderstanding regarding grace that is woefully shallow. This misunderstanding is not so much regarding what the term itself means, but rather why it is given in the first place. The apostle Paul uses the term more frequently than anybody in the Bible. In fact, he used it just a little bit short of a hundred times. Many times it appears in the introductions to his writings as a part of his greeting. This was normal usage in secular Greek, and thus had somewhat of a similarity with *shalom* of the Hebrew language.

The term, as it is used in Hebrew, tends to be synonymous with the English term "gracefulness," "beauty," or "favor." However, Paul spiritualized the Greek term and made use of it to represent qualities of God of great significance to our spiritual understanding and salvation.

In secular Greek, the word *charis*, translated into the English word "grace," means "gratifying in manner" or "that which causes delight." It is the second part of the meaning that Paul spiritualized for the benefit of our understanding by emphasizing it as an unearned, unmerited gift freely given by God that produces good things. That is where the delight comes from. In addition, the biblical usage retains its sense of beauty. Paul

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uses it in one of the most common of ways:

I Thessalonians 1:1 Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul uses it here to indicate a quality or an attribute of God's and Jesus Christ's character and personality. In this sense, it is similar to other attributes, such as mercy, power, or peace.

Now, think back just briefly to Hebrews 4:16. Did you notice that Paul separated "grace" and "mercy"? He did, because they are not precisely, not exactly the same thing. Each one of them is a separate attribute of God's character, of what He is. So in Paul's mind, grace is a separate, distinct attribute, but nonetheless closely related to the other attribute. As Paul used it in I Thessalonians 1:1, grace emphasizes God's broad and undeserved, unearned kindness.

The second way Paul uses it is more specific, and the one that we are most familiar with, and it is this: it is His active dynamic favor toward us which flows from the kindness of His disposition. This usage has many applications to it because His kindness cannot be limited to one single instance of His favor. Used this way, God's grace will be manifested by the apostle Paul in four different ways. One is our deliverance from the guilt and punishment of sin; in other words, being forgiven. We are forgiven by grace, because He is kind.

The second one is really the wonderful one. This second way is His grace is the dynamic transforming operation of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and minds beginning with our calling and continuing all the way through sanctification. It is the dynamic transforming operation of the Holy Spirit.

The third way is that Paul refers to our glorification in terms of grace. And the fourth way is he refers to the state of our salvation as grace. In this case, grace represents the sum-total of all of the blessings of God's kindness. In other words, he equates salvation and grace as though they are one and the same, and we will see why as we go on.

Ephesians 2:8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

Here he is referring to the entire salvation package. You will see why in a little bit, but I will explain it to you. If all God did was forgive us, we still would not make it. We would never grow.

Romans 5:2 By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

Our standing before God is equated with grace, and so again he is really referring to the entire salvation package. In all cases that grace is referenced, each is underlined by the fact that on God's part His favor is entirely sovereign and unconditional. In other words, grace is given freely, meaning that He is unconstrained and unobligated to do whatever He does for man. He is *never* obligated to man; even to His converted children. So it is not just one time in our lives that we need grace to be forgiven so that we can say we are saved by the blood of the Lamb. We need grace constantly!

Are you beginning to get the picture? Those children of His who cooperate with Him have an unbroken stream of grace that is being given to them. It is a constant, moving, dynamic force, power, and enablement to accomplish what He sets before us. So nothing forces Him but His own motives to favor us. Equally important is the often overlooked fact that grace is in operation throughout the entire salvation process, not merely at the beginning with the forgiveness of sin.

II Corinthians 2:14 Now thanks be unto God, which always causes us to triumph in Christ, and makes manifest the savor of his knowledge by us in every place.

As we come to understand grace and its operations in our converted life, it should produce a humble thankfulness. The thanks toward God in this verse shows that He leads us. This thought continues directly to Philipians 2.

Philipians 2:13 For it is God which works in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

II Corinthians 2:14 [Phillips Translation] Thanks be to God who leads us wherever we are on Christ's triumphant way and makes our knowledge of Him spread throughout the world like a lovely perfume.

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This fact is exceedingly important to understand how close He is to us. What do we do with that? To those who get it, it makes them very small. It makes them feel thankful that He is there at all times. I will give more on this thought a bit later, but right now it is sufficient to understand that in relation to His kindness, He owes us absolutely nothing. He is never indebted to us under any circumstance at any time during our pilgrimage. As I mentioned, when we understand this, it is really humbling. Listen to what the apostle Paul says:

I Corinthians 4:7 For who makes you to differ from another? And what have you that thou did not receive? Now if you did receive it, why do you glory, as if you had not received it?

I think that Titus 2:11-14 is one of the most significant of all the statements in the Bible in reference to grace. Let us notice what it says:

Titus 2:11-14 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

Do you ever think of grace teaching you or training you in anything? I am going to read this to you from the Moffatt translation just to give you a modern version of this.

For the grace of God has appeared to save all men, and it schools us to renounce irreligion and worldly passions and to live a life of self-mastery, of integrity, and of piety in this present world, awaiting the blessed hope of the appearance of the glory of God and our Savior Jesus Christ who gave Himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity, and to secure Himself a clean people with a zest for good works.

We are going to examine the words "teaching" and "appeared." First of all, teaching. Modern commentators prefer the English word "trained" or "schooled," and there are two reasons why. First of all, the English word "teaching" is perceived as more passive as compared to "trained," which implies a more active aggressive involvement of the teacher. Secondly, it is because the underlying Greek word in context indicates a wide

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variety of circumstances taking place over a long period of time during which the instruction is being accomplished.

In other words, "grace," which is what we are talking about here, is teaching. Grace is training. Grace is schooling. Grace is not a simple, one-time affair, but a continuous circumstance that includes word-of-mouth tutoring and discipline, as putting one through a drill over and over again until one gets it. The word "teaching" is even used in the Bible as "chastisement" in the form of hard punishment; in other words, "a hard spanking." And thus tutoring, drilling, and chastising are all affected by grace.

The word "appear" is really interesting. The underlying Greek word is one that almost all of us are familiar with because it came from the Greek into the English virtually unchanged. It is the word "epiphany." The word "epiphany" indicates "appearing" or "manifestation" in the sense of something penetrating, such as each morning the light of the sun appears and penetrates the darkness, driving it away. It also includes the realization of an idea, a concept, a teaching, or a puzzle within one's mind that is suddenly understood or perceived, driving away mystery, obscurity, and error or confusion, and replacing it with clarity. It is interesting that Jesus' transfiguration before Peter, James, and John is described as an epiphany.

God's grace made its appearance, salvation bringing. That is what the Greek actually says if we were to put it into English literally. Salvation, or God's grace, made its appearance, salvation bringing.

I want you to notice that verse 11 begins with the word "for." Now the word "for" is being used as a conjunction bridging from a previous statement, and what follows the word "for" provides an explanation of that statement.

Now who or what is the term "grace" (a dynamic attribute of God) referring to? Notice verse 10 of Titus 2.

Titus 2:10 Not purloining, but showing all good fidelity; that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things.

And then with verse 11 comes the explanation, beginning with the word "For." Verse 10 mentions "God our Savior" and the "For" in verse 11 bridges between Him and grace.

Titus 2:11 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.

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John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

John 1:4-5 In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.

John 1:14-18 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spoke, He that comes after me is preferred before me: for he was before me. And of his fullness have all we received, and grace for grace. For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. No man has seen God at any time, the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he has declared him.

Let us review these. The Word—Jesus Christ—is the "Who" of Titus 2:11. Jesus Christ is the "Who" grace is referring to here. Notice that verses 4 and 5 describe His epiphany—His appearing. "He burst on the scene" is the way that John is describing it. Suddenly we saw this great light. And what was His light? It was His life. It was the way He lived, and what He said.

This is followed in verse 14 with a further explanation by mentioning that His glory was seen; that is, it was witnessed by many. The mention of "glory" here could be a reference to God's glory appearing before Israel a number of times in the Tabernacle in the wilderness. John is making a connection so that those people who were familiar with the Old Testament would understand.

Now within the same verses, John mentions specifically the glory they witnessed as being "grace and truth." In verse 17, he uses a Hebrew idiom translated as "grace for grace" in the King James Version. The idiom indicates a fullness of grace, and it could easily be translated as "grace heaped upon grace." But it is more than that, because the term indicates something transferable—a quality, a gift, or an attribute that can be given by one and received by another.

This aspect is amplified in verse 17 by John's statement, showing that the law was given by God through Moses, and it was received by whom? You see something received, something given, something transferable from one to another. The "in-between" God was Moses, and those who ultimately received through Moses were the Israelites who made the Old Covenant with God. So a transfer went from God to Moses to those who

received it.

In a parallel manner, grace and truth were given by God through Jesus Christ, and received most especially by those who made the New Covenant with God. This does not mean that those under the Old Covenant received no grace and truth, but that through Christ and the New Covenant, the gifts were greatly magnified.

Again, I want you to reflect on John 1:4 which tell us that Jesus Christ was "generating the glory," and it was His life, His manner of living which was generating that; meaning more specifically, what He said and what He did—such things as His healings and forgiveness, His attitude, His perspective regarding people, things and events. In other words, the light was a clear revelation of the instruction contained within His example of the way God lives all the time, and the way men should strive to live.

When we put all these things together, John said that Jesus was the personification of both truth and grace. This reveals to us, His disciples who never got to witness Jesus' example in person, the answer to the identity of the "what" Paul was referring to in Titus 2:11. The "who" was Jesus Christ. Who is our tutor? Jesus Christ. Who is training us? Jesus Christ. Who is putting us through drills? Jesus Christ. And who is chastising us? Jesus Christ.

Does He only do that once? No! It comes constantly. Each aspect of what He is to us is a dynamic flowing of enablement to do what He requires of us. So if we do not get anything else, the grace of God is with us all the time, and it is the means of salvation.

Now what is the "what"? It is the Gospel. You see, we do not get the opportunity to spend time with Jesus Christ the way the apostles did. This is why I referred to you that verse in John 17:20, where Jesus said "I am praying for those who will read their words." What did they write? They wrote the New Testament, and so we read about Jesus Christ and all His gifts, all His attributes, and everything that He has to give us, and so we are receiving the grace of God from two different aspects at the same time. One is the personal example that we see in His life and the relationship we have with Him through prayer, through Bible study, and through whatever.

The other one is that we can read out of His word and receive the grace through the words of God as they are written. So why are these words in Titus 2:11-14 so important? Paul is indicating that grace—that is, Jesus Christ as High Priest—is carrying on a continuous process of tutoring, drilling, and chastisement aimed toward a specific goal and worked within a specific time-frame, while focused upon self-control, integrity, and godliness. In other words, these three broad areas of personal character are

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created and shaped to reach certain standards. The relationship between God and the Israelites in the wilderness is a clear example. For forty years God supplied their every need while preparing them to take over the Promised Land. His presence was with them in the Cloud by day and in the Pillar of fire by night.

Every day the manna fell and was witness of His presence that was with them. Because of His grace, He fought battles for them so that they were able to overcome enemies that were greater than they. It was a forty-year long continuous process of Him through His daily gifts, ensuring their arrival if they cooperated. But unfortunately, the entire older generation, except for Joshua and Caleb, failed to take advantage of the relationship that had been established. It is no wonder the apostle Paul said, "I beat my body, lest I find myself a castaway." He did everything in his power to cooperate with God, and it is why he said, "I can do all things through Jesus Christ, who strengthens me."

So, in like manner, but far, far more spiritual, from our calling until entrance into the Kingdom of God, we are accompanied by Jesus Christ as our High Priest, responsible to the Father for our arrival in His family kingdom, prepared to live within it. Because it is spiritual, it must be lived by faith, not by sight. He even tells us that He is the spiritual manna that came down from heaven, and that we must eat of Him if we are going to have the spiritual strength to reach the Kingdom of God and be prepared to live within it.

We have one aspect of the manna: His word at our fingertips. But all along the way He is tutoring us as we go on. In these verses, we are being urged to control ourselves, and to give testimony by our example of a steadfast pattern of the character of the righteousness of God before men. Now how can this be done? The answer is contained within our relationship with Him.

Consider this thought: God's grace plays the major role in every aspect of whatever it is that we finally become in God's creative efforts to prepare us for living in His family kingdom. It is His grace that triggers the action of our calling. Being led to repentance and forgiveness is an action of His grace. The receiving of His Spirit and the access into His presence is an operation of His grace.

The motivation in us to seek Him that suggests movement toward Him in order to be like Him is an operation of His grace. "For it is God who works in us both to will and to do." That same man also taught that "My God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory by Jesus Christ." Thus during sanctification, because we have this access, a weaning away from the carnality and the worldliness is achieved.

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The entire program of redemption is rooted in, and the strength supplied by, the grace of God. The purpose of redemption is transformation and glorification that will occur if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end, and if we continue in the faith, grounded and settled, and not moved away from the hope of the Gospel.

Now how does this apply to the personalities of Hebrews 11? Recalling my previous sermon, I told you that verse 13 contains a success formula. They saw the promises afar off. They were persuaded of them, and embraced them. The term "embraced" suggests an intimate relationship with a strong and enduring affection.

The affection was in reality for the One giving the promises which were deemed worthy of their embrace because these heroes of faith trusted the character, and especially the faithfulness of the One giving the promises. That One was Jesus Christ. Their affection and their embrace was in reality for a person. That should not be hard to understand. The complete formula was not given in verse 13, but it must include also verses 14 through 16, which explains that they, despite the many trials the Bible records, carried through on their part by keeping their eyes on the goal.

They lived in their present, but they conducted their lives in regard to the future—the promises. This is why Paul urges us in Colossians 3:1-2 to seek those things which are above. They had every opportunity to bail out, as verses 16 and 17 show, but they did not because they knew God, and loved and trusted the Promise-Giver. This is why I touched on those verses regarding Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the consistent mention of an altar showing their continuous devotion to Him. And seeking God—the unseen Co-worker—was a consistent discipline of their daily lives, and thus they too drew on His grace daily. That is why they made it.

John 15:5 I am the vine, you are the branches: He that abides in me, and I in him, the same brings forth much fruit: for without me you can do nothing.

Do you think He means that? Do you think He is fudging on anything? No. He meant exactly what He said. This is why we have to do everything in our power to develop the relationship with Him because He is the source of the grace that enables us to submit to Him in preparation for marriage. We are preparing for our wedding to Him, and we will get there, because during this time we have taken advantage of the opportunity to love Him.