

The **Berean Searchlight**

Studying God's Word, Rightly Divided

January 2010



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The **Purpose** of the *Berean Bible Society* is to help you understand and enjoy the Bible. The **Mission** of BBS is to exalt the Lord Jesus Christ by proclaiming the whole counsel of God according to the revelation of the Mystery. Our **Goals** are to evangelize the lost, to educate the saved in “rightly dividing the Word of truth” (II Tim. 2:15), to energize their Christian lives, and to encourage the local church.

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From the President's Desk

Dear Ones,

As the new year dawns, each day is another day of grace. Exactly how long the long-suffering of God will be extended is only known to our heavenly Father. The one thing we do know for sure is this, we are two thousand years closer to the blessed event we call the Rapture. With the clock ticking, time is of the essence! When we ponder the wonders of His grace, it is a great honor to be used of the Lord to make known the unsearchable riches of Christ. And we sincerely appreciate your partnership in the gospel, as we labor together to fulfill the ministry entrusted to us.

Someone recently asked me where I find the time to write a book. "You're an administrator of a national organization, you travel most of the year, you write articles for the *Berean Searchlight*, and you somehow keep up with personal correspondence. When do you sleep?" One thing I learned early in the Lord's work is the importance of time management. At this point in my life, I have it down to a science, at least for the most part.

While most authors devote all of their time to complete a manuscript from cover to cover, this would be unrealistic for yours truly. During the course of the year, my motto of working on a commentary is "here a little, there a little." Besides taking a couple of days away from the office to retire to a "secret writing place" occasionally, I sometimes squeeze a few hours in over the weekend, although I usually set this time aside for the family when I'm not traveling.

By the time, you read these lines, my commentary on *Paul's Letter to the Philippians* will have been completed. This work is woven throughout with practical applications for every day Christian living. Lord willing, we are still on schedule for a spring release; therefore, the announcement will probably appear in our *Spring Communiqué*, as to the release date of the volume and any special offers.

As the days grow darker and darker, it is important to pray for one another. We are indeed thankful for those who pray for us without ceasing that God would give us boldness to proclaim the mystery of the gospel. Since it is impossible to rewind our lives and start over, let's use what time God has given to us wisely. In addition to finding fulfillment in the Lord's service, when death points his bony finger at us and says, "It's time!" we won't have any regrets regarding a misspent life. May God's very best be yours in the coming year.

Yours in the fellowship of His grace,
Paul M. Sadler, President



Are You a Pauline Epistle?

**“Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men”
(II Cor. 3:2).**

Since the Corinthians were saved by Paul’s gospel (I Cor. 15:1-4), the apostle calls them *his epistles*. Webster said that an epistle is “a writing... communicating intelligence to a distant person.” Surely the “intelligence,” i.e., the *information* that the Corinthians communicated to the world was that even the most sinful of men could be justified by God’s grace (I Cor. 6:9-11).

But if Paul could say to the Corinthians, “ye are *our* epistle,” why does he go on to say that they were “manifestly declared to be *the epistle of Christ*” (3:3)? Ah, a letter written by an apostle under the inspiration of the Spirit *was* a letter from Christ! And since everyone who is saved today is also saved as a result of having believed Paul’s gospel, *you too* are a Pauline epistle! And so the debate over whether Paul wrote 14 or just 13 epistles is over! The apostle penned *millions* of letters over the past many centuries.

It has often been said that you are the only Bible that some people will ever read, and this is sadly so. What a responsibility this places on us to live lives worthy of the Lord! Handwriting experts can tell who a letter is from by the way the i’s are dotted and the t’s are crossed, etc. Can men tell who sent *you*, Christian friend? Are you dotting all the i’s and crossing all the t’s when it comes to *godliness*? Many Christians who wouldn’t dream of corrupting the *written* word of God found in Paul’s epistles (II Cor. 2:17) carelessly corrupt the *living* epistles of their lives by inconsistent godliness. Remember, letters don’t get time off! They read the same today as they did yesterday, and we too should be as consistent in our Christian testimony. If you are holy on Sunday and a holy terror the rest of the week, this is unacceptable to God (Rom. 12:1,2).

Since the epistle of our life is “known *and* read of all men” (II Cor. 3:2), we want to make sure we don’t give men a faulty “*reading*” of Christ. All men understand by the stars that God exists, as the stars too are known and read of all men (Psa. 19:1-3). But while all men understand by the stars that God *exists*, all men understand by *us* what *kind* of God He is. When we live “*soberly, righteously, and godly*” (Titus 2:12), we prove to others what is acceptable to the Lord (Eph. 5:8-10). —Pastor Kurth

The Anatomy of God's Plan of Salvation



By Paul M. Sadler

The *Berean Bible Society* Board of Directors unanimously felt the need to publish the following article at this time to address the issue of Reconciliation.

—Pastor Sadler

“To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.”

—II Cor. 5:19

A new teaching has recently been introduced into Grace circles that has caused a great deal of concern among the brethren, ourselves included. Essentially it is being proposed that the sins of the world were *forgiven* when God reconciled the world to Himself. This, it is said, explains why the sins of the unbeliever are not imputed to him, nor will his trespasses ever be brought before the bar of God's justice.

Those who are proponents of this position often state: “It is not a

sin question, but a Son question.” If this is true, then we are left with this conclusion: the terrorists who plotted and carried out the evil attack on the World Trade Center, where nearly 3,000 souls perished, will never be judged for their sins against humanity. After all, they are forgiven in Christ, according to this position! At the Great White Throne then, the issue isn't that unbelievers are still in their sins or have sinned against a holy and righteous God; rather, it has to do with their rejection of the Son. Since they don't possess His righteousness they will suffer the eternal consequences in the lake of fire.

When you first hear the statement, “It is not a sin question, but

a Son question,” it seems to be a reasonable assertion, but upon further investigation it is actually a serious departure from what the Scriptures teach on the subject. While those who champion the above position **do not** believe or teach Universal Reconciliation/Universalism, we fear that some who sit under their teaching will eventually gravitate to this type of extreme, which to many would be a logical conclusion. In fact, this is already beginning to take place. Universal Reconciliation/Universalism is the teaching that God is going to save all the unsaved in the end, including Satan and his fallen host. If there is any teaching that will destroy the spirit of evangelism, it is this one.

While God has indeed paid the *penalty* for the sins of the world through the finished work of Christ at Calvary, forgiveness is not granted to the sinner until he responds to God in faith, believing that Christ died for his sins and rose again. Without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6). We concur that God is not imputing sin today under grace, but this in no way implies that He will not take up the sin question in a future day, as we are going to see.

GOD'S PROVISION

It has been correctly observed that there are three doctrines that make up God's plan of salvation: "Redemption, which looks toward sin; Reconciliation, which looks toward man; and Propitiation, which looks toward God."¹ With this in mind, Paul states:

"For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus

judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead" (II Cor. 5:14).

According to Romans 3:23, "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God," without exception. I think everyone would be in agreement that "all" are dead in trespasses and sins. Since this is an undeniable fact, then the apostle's argument in the above passage is this: Christ died for *all* because *all* were dead. In other words, redemption is *unlimited*; Christ paid the penalty for the sins of the world. A **provision** has been made for all.

Eternity in the lake of fire could never satisfy the righteous demands of a Holy God in payment for sin; only the Cross could accomplish this on behalf of the sinner. Therefore, Calvary removed all the barriers, making it possible for God to reconcile an alienated world unto Himself.



"Years ago in a Western city, a husband and wife became estranged and finally separated. They left the city and resided in different parts of the country. The husband, one day, chanced to return to this city on a matter of business. He went out to the cemetery to the grave of their only son. He was standing by the grave in fond reminiscence, when he heard

a step behind him. Turning, he saw his estranged wife. The first inclination of both was to turn away. But they had a common binding interest in that grave; and instead of turning away they clasped hands over that grave of their son and were reconciled one to another. It took nothing less than death to reconcile them!

“It takes nothing less than death, the precious blood of Christ, to reconcile man to God. The pronouncement, the proclamation of that, is the gospel message.”²

Normally when we think of a reconciliation between two parties who have been alienated, we tend to picture it as each party coming halfway to meet in the middle. Each side made some type of concession. But notice carefully the wording of II Corinthians 5:19: “To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself.” God never moved! Nor did He diminish or give up any of His attributes to secure the reconciliation of the world. God’s righteousness, holiness, and *justice* remains the same yesterday, today, and forever.

The reconciliation spoken of in II Corinthians 5:19 is to be viewed as a key part of **God’s provision** for mankind, not as personal salvation. If this were true, then the whole world would be saved, which we certainly know is not the case. When God reconciled the world to Himself, it simply removed all the obstructions that barred man’s way to God. Once God initiated this part of His plan of salvation He required that the sinner respond to this gracious provision for the reconciliation to be *complete*. For example:

During *Desert Storm* the allied forces offered *amnesty* to the Iraqi army near the end of the war. You may recall seeing a cartoon in a national newspaper at the time depicting the scene. It portrayed two US GI’s sitting in a little CJ Army Jeep. In front of the jeep was a huge truck filled with Iraqi soldiers strapped with machine guns and plenty of ammunition. However, they all had their hands high in the air—they accepted the amnesty that was being offered. Of course, those soldiers who refused the amnesty placed their lives in jeopardy.

Today God is offering the world amnesty, which includes forgiveness and eternal life through Jesus Christ. But in order to benefit from this gracious offer the sinner must receive it by believing that Christ died for his sins and rose again. Those who fail to accept the amnesty will perish in their sins. This is why Paul begs men, “We pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God” (II Cor. 5:20). So then, reconciliation is *two-way*. Although God has reconciled the world to Himself the reconciliation is not complete until man receives it. The very fact that Paul tells us to beg sinners to be reconciled to God clearly shows it is **not** complete until it’s accepted.

“To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them” (II Cor. 5:19).

Those who believe and teach, “It is no longer a sin question, but a Son question,” use this passage to support their position. They understand Paul to be saying that since God is not imputing the unbelievers’ sin to them they are

forgiven. This explains why God is not placing their sins to their account today. Consequently, if the unbeliever receives eternal condemnation, they say, it will not be due to his sins, but for not having Christ's righteousness because he failed to believe the gospel. This view is flawed for a number of reasons.

First and foremost, if you say the *unbeliever* is forgiven of his sins, then you are saying they had the blood of Christ *applied* to them ***apart from faith***, because there is no forgiveness without the blood (Heb. 9:22). There is simply no way around this conclusion! It is important to remember in this discussion that there is a major difference between God making a *provision* for the penalty of the sins of the world, through the death of Christ, and the actual application of it to the sinner's life ***through faith and the operation of the Spirit***.

In Egypt, for example, God required that His people shed the blood of the Passover lamb and drain it into a basin. Then they were to take the hyssop and apply the blood to the lintel above and the door posts so the destroyer would pass over their dwelling and spare their firstborn. It was not enough to know that God had made a *provision* for the household; in their case, they had to literally *apply* the blood by faith or suffer the consequences.

According to Ephesians 1:7, if the teaching under consideration is true, it would mean the unbeliever has to be *in Christ*. If they are in Christ then they enjoy all the benefits of being in Him; which includes justification, sanctification,

glorification, eternal life, etc. Notice the wording of the passage in Ephesians carefully.

“In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace” (Eph. 1:7).

Allow me to give a brief commentary on this verse highlighting key words and phrases: **“In Whom,”** that is, *in Christ*. According to this passage, there is no redemption or forgiveness outside of Christ. Paul adds, **“we,”** that is, the members of the Body of Christ who have accepted God's offer of reconciliation, we are the beneficiaries of His finished work. It is the *believer*, not the unbeliever who has had redemption applied through the blood of Christ, even the forgiveness of our sins.

Another area of concern with the view, “It is no longer a sin question, but a Son question,” is the unbeliever will never be held *accountable* for his sins—he's forgiven. But is this true? Clearly there are a host of Scriptures that teach otherwise.

THE JUDGMENT TO COME

“Not imputing their trespasses unto them” (II Cor. 5:19).

In time past, God frequently did impute sin to the offender and judgment followed like lightning. When Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, offered strange fire upon the altar, which the Lord had not commanded, God rained fire down upon the two for their sin (Lev. 10:1,2). During the wilderness wanderings, a man was found gathering sticks on the Sabbath. When Moses sought the face of the Lord, as to what should be done with the man, the Lord instructed

Moses that he should be taken out and stoned by the congregation for his sin (Num. 15:32-36).



Today, God is not accusing men of their sins, nor is He judging sin. Under grace, God is inviting men to come to Him that they might be saved and receive the forgiveness of their sins. For the time being, God has put aside judgment and is offering deliverance from the wrath to come through His dear Son (Rom. 5:9). That's grace! But mark these words and mark them well, if the sinner rejects God's generous offer of reconciliation and dies in his sins, he will be judged for his trespasses in the *future*. The Apostle Paul says this to all unbelievers who habitually continue in their sin before God:

“Or despisest thou the riches of His goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardness and impenitent heart *treasurest up* unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; Who will render to every man according to his deeds” (Rom. 2:4-6).

Even though God is not charging men with their sins today or judging them, a record is being

kept of every evil word, thought, and deed. The unbeliever is *stockpiling* his transgressions against the day of wrath and the righteous judgment of God. The *day of wrath* spoken of here by the apostle is a reference to the Great White Throne Judgment when all the unsaved of every age will stand before God. To show you that the “sin question” in respect to the unsaved is still an open issue with God, Paul says this to the saints at Ephesus who were being troubled by evildoers.

“For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the *wrath of God upon the children of disobedience*” (Eph. 5:5,6 cf. Col. 3:5,6).

The Apostle John also confirms that the “sin question” is still on the table, for those who die outside of Christ, when he received the revelation of the Last Judgment:

“And I saw a great white throne, and Him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works” (Rev. 20:11-12).

The purpose of the last Judgment is not to determine whether or not those who are standing before the throne are saved. Quite the contrary, those who appear

at this judgment are called, “the dead,” dead, that is, in trespasses and sin. Pastor Stam makes these insightful comments about the scene that is before us:

“Here, at last, sinners will find themselves exposed to the searching gaze of Him who is ‘of purer eyes than to behold evil’ and who ‘cannot look upon iniquity.’ Here, finally, their sins will be manifested in their true light as utterly accursed and worthy only of the most dreadful retribution. At first it may appear that there are no witnesses. But the Great Witness is on the throne. A second is in every man’s heart, a third in every neighbor’s face, and all the evidence is in the ‘books.’”³

The unsaved will be judged out of those things that are written in the books (vs. 12). As noted a moment ago, a complete record is being made of the life of every unbeliever. The secret sins of men are being stored in creation to be revealed in the day of His wrath. This is confirmed by Joshua who stated these words to his countrymen: “Behold, this stone shall be a witness unto us; for it hath heard all the words of the LORD which He spake unto us: it shall be therefore a witness unto you, lest ye deny your God” (Joshua 24:27). A solemn thought that we all would do well to remember.

Both Paul and John refer to the unsaved being judged according to their deeds and their works. Is there any possibility whatsoever that these are good deeds or meritorious works that were done on behalf of God or men? None! Solomon says in Proverbs that “the plowing of the wicked, is sin.” Paul adds, “For whatsoever is not

of faith is sin” (Rom. 14:23). In their rejection of the Savior, they committed the ultimate sin of unbelief. If all sin is forgiven, as they say, is this sin forgiven too? Since the unsaved have not faith we can safely conclude that these are evil deeds and the works of the flesh enumerated in Galatians 5:19-21.

There is little doubt that the unredeemed will declare all the wonderful works that they had done in the Lord’s name, as they plead for their justification, but the Lord’s response will be, “depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (See Matthew 7:21-23 for the rest of the story). Furthermore, those who die in their sins (John 8:24) are said to be “judged according to works,” which indicates that the degree of punishment will match the offense against God (Matt. 11:20-24).

“The unbeliever
is *stockpiling* his
transgressions against
the day of wrath...”

If you have seen the pictures of the holocaust or heard the testimonials of our GI’s who liberated the death camps, such as *Auschwitz*, there was one mastermind behind all the carnage, Hitler. Six million Jews perished in these camps, which Hitler called, *The Final Solution*. God did not impute his sins and atrocities to him when he walked the earth, but He will at the last Judgment. God may well pass the

specter of his victims before him to expose the scope of his evil deeds. His punishment in the lake of fire will match his atrocities, to which Hitler himself will acknowledge that his condemnation is just. His knee will bow, not in reconciliation, but in subjugation, and his tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:9-11).

OUR COMMISSION

“And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation” (II Cor. 5:18).


As we have seen, before God could reconcile the world to Himself the penalty of sin had to be addressed. This has been accomplished through Christ’s finished work. Christ came to be a propitiation for the sins of the world (Rom. 3:25,26 cf. I John 2:2). Propitiation is satisfaction! It is that which allows God to act mercifully toward man. Sin demanded judgment, it demanded punishment, it demanded a blood sacrifice. The death of Christ *satisfied* all the just demands of God. Now that God has been reconciled to the world through the death of His Son, He says to the world—come, everyone is welcome! A *provision* has been made for all!

When the Lord called us by His grace to be His ambassadors He committed to us the word of reconciliation. This is the believers’ commission under Grace. Our ministry is to tell everyone that God loves them. It is not a part of our job description to pass judgment on the sins that men commit. The work is done, the price

has been paid, all that remains is for the sinner to place his faith in Christ that He died for his sins and rose again.

Salvation is not a process, it is instantaneous. Once the sinner trusts Christ as his personal Savior the Holy Spirit identifies him with Christ’s death, burial and resurrection. This is the moment when the blood of Christ is applied to a lost soul by the Spirit and *forgiveness* is granted by God. The Apostle Paul confirms this for us when he wrote to the Colossians concerning their transformation in Christ:

“And you, being dead *in your sins* and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened [to make one alive] together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses” (Col. 2:13).

With so many uncertain trumpets being sounded these days, it is essential that we compare spiritual things with spiritual things to ensure that we are staying on the message. Consequently, it’s imperative that this errant teaching be abandoned to maintain the unity of the faith. May God, in His matchless grace, help us to heed the counsel of the Apostle Paul to the Corinthians: “That ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.” 

Endnotes

1. *A Dispensational Theology* by Charles F. Baker, Pg. 347, Grace Bible College Publications, Grand Rapids, MI.
2. Illustration by Clarence E. Macartney.
3. *Man, His Nature and Destiny* by Pastor C. R. Stam, Pg. 127, Berean Bible Society, Germantown, WI.

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The Abiding Trinity

(Cont'd)



By Cornelius R. Stam

THE ABIDING TRINITY

“And now abideth faith, hope, love, these three.”¹

The word *now* is not used here in a temporal but a *logical* sense. It could be rendered: “And *thus* these three remain.” It is the next logical step in his argument that while some things will pass away to be replaced by others, there are certain basic factors which will “*abide*” or *remain*. These are *faith, hope and love*, and with the passing of the sign gifts these give *full and sufficient evidence* of normal and healthy Christianity. Let those of *that* day possess them and they will grow in grace, passing naturally from infancy to maturity, from “that which is in part” to “that which is perfect [fully developed].” Let the believer *today* possess them in good

measure and they will keep him from spiritual decline.

The three are a trinity. While the apostle may speak of any one or two or of all three together, yet they are so wholly one that no one can exist apart from the other two. Furthermore, each is equally important in its way. *Love* is the “greatest,” the crowning virtue. It is of *paramount* importance. Yet *faith* is of *primary* importance. Faith must come first, for “without faith it is impossible to please Him.” And *hope*, or expectancy, is of *perpetual* importance. It lies at the center of our daily Christian experience.

It was these three graces that the apostle looked for in each one of the churches, judging the genuineness of its profession by the measure of their presence or

absence. He never asked: “How many baptized converts have you?” or “How many of you have the sign gifts?” The program was no longer: “*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved...and these signs shall follow them that believe*” (Mark 16:16,17). He always looked for faith, hope and love.

In writing to the *Romans* he recognizes the fact that their “faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.” But is their faith accompanied by an equal measure of hope and love? He has never been among them and cannot fully know since they are at so great a distance from him, but he does tell them what is necessary in this regard, particularly in Romans 5:1-5: “Being justified by FAITH, we have peace with God” and “access into this grace wherein we stand.” And more: though in ourselves we still “come short of the glory of God,” we may “rejoice in HOPE of the glory of God.” And this hope “maketh not ashamed; because the LOVE of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.”

The *Corinthians* had broken his heart. With their exaggerated emphasis on the sign gifts they had neglected faith, hope and love. The apostle is most guarded in addressing them in both his letters to them. While he praises others for the evidences of their salvation, in the case of the Corinthians he merely writes: “*I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ*” (I Cor. 1:4). They bore some evidence of FAITH (I Cor. 1:4-6) and some of HOPE (Ver. 7) but little of LOVE,

and this affected their faith and hope as well (1:10-12). Even after the rebuke of his first letter it was still necessary for him to exhort them to “prove the sincerity of your love” and “show...the proof of your love” (II Cor. 8:8,24).

Thus in I Corinthians 13 we find him emphasizing their need of all three—especially love.

The *Galatian* church was another keen disappointment to Paul. Their departure from the grace of God, “so soon” after having come to rejoice in it, left him stunned and grieved (Gal. 1:6-10). With the Galatians it was *faith* that was basically involved but this affected their *hope* too, for he asks them: “Where is then the blessedness ye spake of?” (4:15) and also their *love*, for, says he: “All the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. But...ye bite and devour one another...” (5:14,15).

Warning them that submission to circumcision implies that Christ is of “no profit” to them and has “become of no effect,” and that it involves them in an obligation to keep “the whole law,” the apostle again groups the three graces together, as he says:

“For we through the Spirit wait for the HOPE of righteousness by FAITH...which worketh by LOVE” (Gal. 5:5,6).

The so-called *Ephesian* epistle was doubtless an encyclical letter, sent to a group of churches, including that at Ephesus. Of them he had better things to say:

“Wherefore I also, after I heard of your FAITH in the Lord Jesus, and LOVE unto all the saints,

“Cease not to give thanks for you...” (Eph. 1:15,16).

As to their HOPE, he reminds them that upon believing they were “sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession” (Vers. 13,14). But he would now establish them in a greater, more wonderful hope, and prays:

“That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of [Christ]:

“The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know WHAT IS THE HOPE OF HIS CALLING...” (Eph. 1:17,18).

The reference here, of course, is to His calling us to a *present* position and *present* blessings in the heavenlies.

Of this glorious calling Paul writes to Timothy:

“[God] hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began” (II Tim. 1:9).

Every believer should know and experience “the hope of His calling,” or, as Weymouth renders it: “the hope which His call to you inspires.”

The *Philippian* church had been threatened with division over a personal misunderstanding, which Paul hastened to deal with, but as a whole they were an outstanding group. That they had a special place in Paul’s affections is evident from the opening words of his letter to them:

“I thank my God upon every remembrance of you,

“Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy” (Phil. 1:3,4).²



The steadfastness of their *faith* was proven by their fellowship with him in the gospel “from the first day until now” (Ver. 5). Their *hope* too was strong, for they had even suffered with him (Vers. 7,29,30). Moreover *he* was confident that God, who had begun this “good work” in them would complete it (Ver. 6). As to their *love*, this had been to some degree adversely affected by the misunderstanding that had arisen (4:2,3) but he seeks to bind them firmly together again as he addresses them “all” (1:1) assures them of his prayers and rejoicing over them “all” (Ver. 4) of his confidence in them “all” (Ver. 7) and his longing for them “all” (Ver. 8). And while he does not use the very words, he again groups faith, hope and love together in his closing exhortation:

“Stand fast in the Lord” (4:1).

There is FAITH.

“Be of the same mind in the Lord” (4:2).

There is LOVE.

“Rejoice in the Lord always” (4:4).

There is HOPE.

The *Colossians* had their difficulties too, with heresy creeping in, but they also stood on a high spiritual plane. Hence the apostle writes of his thanksgiving and prayers for them.

“Since we heard of your FAITH in Christ Jesus, and of the LOVE which ye have to all the saints, For the HOPE which is laid up for you in heaven...” (1:3-5).

To them too he could write of the deeper, more glorious truths associated with “the mystery,” so that in the Colossian letter we are again taken to the very heights of spiritual truth.

The *Thessalonian* congregation has long been known as “the model church” and in Paul’s letters to them (probably his earliest) we find faith, hope and love most strikingly grouped together. In their case especially *hope* is generally mentioned last, consistent with the fact that these epistles are basically concerned with “the blessed hope,” concerning which they needed some instruction.

In the opening words of his first letter to them the apostle recalls their “work of FAITH,” their “labor of LOVE,” and their “patience of HOPE” (1:3). Then he recalls how they had “turned to God from idols”—there is FAITH—“to serve the living and the true God”—there is LOVE—“and to wait for His Son from heaven”—there is HOPE (1:9,10). Indeed the whole first chapter is divided into three parts, the first having basically to do with their FAITH (Vers. 1-5) the second with their LOVE (Vers. 6-8) and the third with their HOPE (Ver. 9-10).

Even at that the apostle urges them to “put on the breastplate of FAITH and LOVE, and for an helmet, the HOPE of salvation” (5:8).

“Oh, that these graces might abound in us, the members of Christ’s Body!”

Faith Hope Love

Upon turning to the salutation to the second epistle we are refreshed to see how they have grown since he last wrote. Says the apostle:

“...your FAITH groweth exceedingly,

“And the LOVE of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth;


“So that we...glory in...your PATIENCE OF FAITH [or Hope] in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure” (II Thes. 1:3,4).

Oh, that these graces might abound in us, the members of Christ’s Body! The individual believer in whom these virtues abound has all he needs and all that God expects of him. All else is bound up in these three. Likewise, the church in which they abound is a full church, whether composed of twenty-five members or twenty-five hundred members.

Sacrifices, circumcision and the law have passed away; the sign gifts have ceased, but these graces remain as an abiding trinity and will abide forever.

One of our hymns reads:
*Faith will vanish into sight;
Hope be emptied in delight. Love
in heav'n will shine more bright.
Therefore give us love.*

But this is not wholly true. While many things we now believe will then be seen and known, it does not follow from this that our faith will then cease. Indeed it will then be *perfected*. Similarly, while things we now hope for will then be realized, it does not

follow that hope, or expectancy, will then cease, for the life to come will be progressive in the glories it unfolds. Love, the crowning grace of all will, of course, also be perfected in heaven. What a prospect is ours! 

Endnotes

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2. Graphic: www.designpics.com

Question Box

“Doesn’t Philippians 1:18 contradict Galatians 1:8?”

In Philippians 1, Paul was speaking of some who were preaching Christ “*of envy and strife*” (v. 15). These preachers *envied* the great number of people Paul had reached with the gospel of Christ. Consequently, they preached Christ of envy and *strife*, which the dictionary defines as “competition between rivals,” and “of contention” (v. 16), which is defined as “a striving to win in competition.” Like many a preacher today, these men thought reaching the lost was a competition among preachers, one in which Paul could no longer be engaged due to his incarceration in a Roman prison (v. 13).

With Paul thus sidelined in a prison, these brethren continued to preach Christ, “*supposing to add affliction*” to Paul’s bonds (v. 16). That is, they supposed Paul *also* viewed reaching the lost as a competition, and it would just eat him up inside to hear his rivals were out gaining converts while he could not. It is in *this* context Paul rejoices that Christ is being preached, for while these brethren were preaching Christ with a faulty *motive*, they were at least preaching the right *message*.

That’s quite different than Galatians 1:8, where Paul pronounces a curse on all who preach a faulty *message*, even if their *motive* was pure and good. God can bless and use the right gospel when it is preached with an envious spirit, but He cannot bless and use a faulty gospel, regardless of how pure and sincere the motivation behind it. —Pastor Kurth



The Measure of the Ministry

By Pastor Ricky Kurth

(A study of the ministry in II Corinthians 1-6—Part 3)

In our study of the ministry in the early chapters of II Corinthians, we come now to Chapter 3, where the Apostle Paul opens this passage by responding to a question that had arisen among the Corinthians concerning his credentials as a minister (II Cor. 3:1). If you're wondering why *anyone* would challenge the credentials of *the Apostle Paul*, it should be remembered here that many of the Corinthians were enamored with a Bible teacher named Apollos (I Cor. 1:12; 3:4). And Apollos had arrived in Corinth with "*epistles of commendation*" (II Cor. 3:1), whereas Paul had not.

If the reader is not familiar with these epistles, it helps to remember that in Paul's day there were no telephones, emails, or other such means of communication. Consequently when a stranger visited your church, there was no way of knowing whether he or she came *recommended* by another group of believers in another city, or if they had rather been disfellowshipped, and were seeking refuge with believers who were unaware that they were under church discipline. Because of this, the saints carried *letters of commendation* (cf. Rom. 16:1,2). Many churches today issue their people a membership letter that can be transferred to other churches for members in good standing, a modern reflection of this ancient means of recommendation.

These epistles were particularly important for traveling *preachers* (Acts 28:21), and so when Apollos “was disposed to pass into Achaia, *“the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him”* (Acts 18:24,27). Hence Apollos arrived in Corinth recommended, while Paul had not.

But the Apostle Paul didn’t *need* letters of commendation, and he tells the Corinthians why in Verse 2, where he reminded them that *“ye are our epistle written in our hearts.”* If anyone was looking for proof of Paul’s credentials, the conversion of the Corinthians spoke volumes! Before Paul arrived, they were “fornicators...idolaters...adulterers...effeminate...abusers of themselves with mankind...thieves...covetous...drunkards...revilers...extortioners” (I Cor. 6:9,10), but now they were “washed,” “sanctified” and “justified” (v. 11). After such a dramatic display of the power of God in the hearts and lives of sinful men, how could anyone question Paul’s credentials—*especially the Corinthians themselves!*

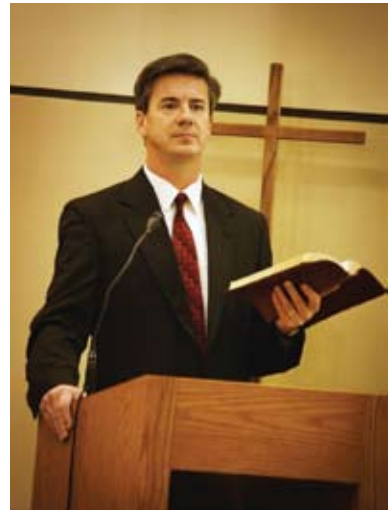
Imagine approaching Moses right after the parting of the Red Sea and asking to see his credentials! If the reader is thinking that this would be silly, since Moses had just worked a mighty miracle, we submit that an even *mightier* miracle had taken place among the Corinthians! Moses overcame the forces of *nature*, but Paul’s ministry overcame the forces of *human* nature, and if the Corinthians had just thought about how hard this is, they wouldn’t have questioned his authority.

Consider for a moment the miraculous power it takes to overcome the fallen nature of sinful men. Once a man crosses the line and sins a certain sin, it is *much* easier to commit that sin the next time he is tempted, and much harder to *stop* these sins once they become habitual, as they had with the Corinthians. Because of this, the most miraculous thing about the kingdom of heaven on earth won’t be how God will overcome the nature of *animals* (Isa. 65: 25); the most miraculous thing about the kingdom will be how God will overcome the fallen nature of *men* and “*cause*” them to walk in His ways (Ezek. 36:27). This is why the conversion of the Corinthians should have provided them with all the credentials they needed of the divine authenticity of Paul’s ministry. While they weren’t yet what they should be, the Corinthians were now “*saints*” (I Cor. 1:2), and a far cry from what they were before Paul hit town!

The best part about miraculous credentials like these is that they are *still available to ministers today*. The resume of Pentecostal pastors might be padded with accounts of “miracles” which are nothing more than the imagined healings of legitimate diseases, or the legitimate healings of imagined diseases. But who would sigh for credentials like these when *the life-changing power of the gospel of the grace of God* is still working in the hearts and souls and lives of men, providing faithful grace pastors with miraculous credentials that are beyond dispute. If the reader has never considered entering the ministry,

consider this your invitation to get involved in the proclamation of the only message that demonstrates the miraculous power of God in this dispensation, the preaching of Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the mystery.

Having said this, we believe that letters of commendation are Pauline, and they are still a good idea for ministers today! While Paul may never have been issued letters of commendation, or having been issued them, may have lost them during his unbelievably tumultuous travels, the fact remains that *even he* went forth recommended by a local church (Acts 13:1,2; 14:26; 15:40). He likewise selected an assistant who also came recommended (16:1,2), and even *wrote* such letters for spiritual leaders (Phil. 2:29; Col. 4:10). Today these letters are called *ordination certificates*, and it is both Scriptural and Pauline for a church to ask for them from potential pastoral candidates.



If indeed Paul had letters of commendation that had been lost, the Corinthians themselves were letters of commendation written in his heart (II Cor. 3:2), and as such *could never be lost*. What a comfort this must have been to the apostle! Similarly, the minister today who spends his life instilling God's Word rightly divided into the hearts and lives of His people will also know the comfort of heart letters that will remain long after the ink on their ordination certificate has faded. Beloved, there are only three things in all of creation that are eternal: God, His Word, and *people*. And a decision to go into the ministry enables a man to be part of what our eternal God is doing in the lives of men *for all eternity*. Who wouldn't want to be a part of that?

Paul's living epistles in Corinth gave him credentials that were written "*with the Spirit of the living God*" (II Cor. 3:3), and it was this that enabled him to have "*such trust*" in his sufficiency as a minister (3:4 cf. 2:16b). Not that he was sufficient *in himself* for the ministry, for he knew full well that his sufficiency was "*of God*" (3:5). Pastor Joel Finck calls this Paul's "*declaration of dependence*" on God, and we heartily agree! This sufficiency taught the apostle, as he says, "*not to think any thing as of ourselves.*" Untold misery has been unleashed on churches by ministers who thought *too much* of themselves and their abilities, forgetting that if *Paul* wasn't sufficient to think anything of *himself*, they probably shouldn't think anything of *themselves* either!

Of course, some men have a problem that is the very opposite of over-confidence, and instead wonder how God could ever use the likes of *them* in the ministry. Knowing this, Paul goes on to say that

“God...hath *made us* able ministers” (II Cor. 3:5,6). If the reader has dismissed thoughts of entering the ministry because he feels as slow and ineloquent as Moses (Ex. 4:10), just remember how God reminded Moses that *He’s* the one who *made* his mouth slow (v. 11), and God doesn’t make tools He can’t use. This writer was once a tool and die maker, but he wasn’t a very good one! Back in those days, we made some tools that *nobody* could use! But this is *not* true of God! You may not *think* you have any ministerial ability, but the word “ability” is related to the word “*able*,” and Paul says that God has “*made us able*” to minister for Him (3:6).

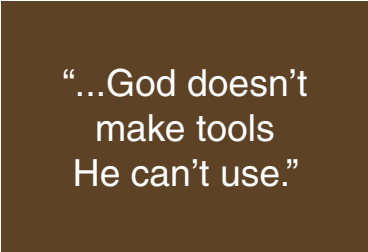
But *how* has God made us able ministers? Not in any miraculous way. We believe that it is rather by giving us a “product” that “sells itself.” Have you ever heard this expression? Manufacturers often recruit salesmen by assuring them that they will be successful selling their product because it sells itself! We would suggest that the only product that *truly* sells itself has two things going for it. First, it is a *superb* product, and second, it is *absolutely free*! Well, what is *our* “product” as ministers? Paul says that God has made us “able ministers *of the new testament*,” and the New Testament is a testament of *grace*. It is all about what God planned to freely give to Israel, after they demonstrated under the Old Testament that they could not procure His blessing for themselves.

We like to illustrate the contrast between these two testaments by comparing what God said to Israel through the ministry of Ezekiel. Under the Old Testament, He said, “Cast away from you all your transgressions...and *make you a new heart and a new spirit...*” (Ezek. 18:31). Under

the New Testament, He promised, “A new heart also *will I give you*, and a new spirit” (Ezek. 36:26). Here we see that the New Testament is clearly a testament of grace, i.e., God doing for Israel what she couldn’t do for herself. And God has made *us* able ministers of the new testament by giving us the message of grace, a superb product that is absolutely free!

Paul then goes on to make clear that we are “ministers of the new testament,” and not of the Old Testament. As he put it, we are “ministers of the new testament; *not of the letter, but of the spirit*” (II Cor. 3:6). The “letter” here is the old testament law of Moses, and the “spirit” refers to the new testament. This contrast between the letter of the old testament and the spirit of the new is a contrast that Paul also draws in Romans (7:6).

Grace pastors can thank God we are not ministers of the old testament, for as he says here, “the letter *killeth*.” That’s because in the



“...God doesn’t
make tools
He can’t use.”

law God said, “keep My statutes, and My judgments: *which if a man do, he shall live in them*” (Lev. 18:5), and He meant *live eternally*. We know this because the Lord *quoted* this verse when asked what to do to inherit *eternal* life (Luke 10:25-28). Of course, since absolutely no one “*continueth...in all things which are written in the book of the law,*” all men are under the curse of the law (Gal. 3:10; James 2:10,11), and so it is true of all men that “*the letter killeth.*” Thank God, it is *also* true that while the law kills, “*the spirit giveth life.*” Grace always does!

Because the letter killeth, Paul calls it “*the ministration of death*” (II Cor. 3:7). “Written and engraven in stones” (v. 7 cf. Deut. 4:13), the law was certainly “*glorious,*” for no nation outside Israel had anything like it (Deut. 4:8). But how could something that condemned all men be called glorious? The answer is, *how could it not be!* It reflected the perfect standard of a perfect God!

How glorious was the law? It was so glorious “the children of Israel could not steadfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance” (II Cor. 3:7). Just as the law reflected God’s perfect standard, the face of Moses reflected the glory of the law. And the law was so glorious, they could not even look at *the reflection* of that glory in Moses’ face. Now, you think about that! The sun may be bright, but you can look at the reflection of the sun in the moon all night long. But the glory of the law was so great they could not steadfastly look at its reflection in Moses’ face.

But while the old testament law was glorious, new testament grace is *more* glorious (3:8). How so? Well, when our civil law condemns a murderer to death, this is a glorious thing, for it reflects the God-given righteous standards of our nation, and of mankind in general (Gen. 9:6). But if the sentencing judge were to volunteer to die in the place of a murderer whom he loved, this would uphold the right-



eous standard of our nation *in a far more glorious way!* It wouldn’t deny that the murderer is worthy of death by letting him go free, it would rather gloriously *satisfy* the law’s just demand by ensuring that the penalty for the broken law was paid. And this is how the blood of the new testament that saves us (I Cor. 11:25) exceeds the glory of the law that condemns us. Rather than denying that the sinner is worthy of eternal death by letting him go free, God gloriously satisfied the law’s just demands by paying for his sins Himself in the person of His Son.

And so if the reader is thinking about entering the ministry, and you are wondering if you would have a glorious ministry if you did, you

have here a *personal guarantee from God Himself* that your ministry *will* be glorious—if you preach grace! The world thinks that a man has a glorious ministry if he ministers in a magnificent cathedral, but it is not glorious in the eyes of God if *grace* is not preached there. Even believers are tempted to think that a ministry is glorious if it is on television all over the world, but it is not glorious in the eyes of God if it does not preach *grace*.

How glorious is God’s grace? An old expression about driving fast says “we were passing cars like they were standing still!” The speed of this speedster was so great it made the speed of the other cars seem as if they had no speed whatsoever! Similarly, God’s grace is so glorious that it made the great glory of the law seem as if it had no glory at all (II Cor. 3:10). And so we can say without reservation that the minister who preaches the unadulterated grace of God leaves other ministries behind in the dust when it comes to glory, at least in the eyes of God. And aren’t His eyes all that matter?



Because of the surpassing glory of grace, the old testament law was “done away,” and replaced by “that which remaineth”, i.e., new testament grace (v. 11). Here we must pause to ask why God would give a law that He knew would some day be obsolete. Is He guilty of “planned obsolescence,” a charge levied years ago against American manufacturers, who it was said *could* have made products that lasted longer, but who allegedly produced merchandise *designed* to wear out, so that consumers would be forced to buy from them again in a few years? If the reader is wondering about this, let him remember this important difference. Rather than giving us a product destined to wear out so we’d have to purchase another one from Him, God gave a law that He knew would have to be replaced, but then promised to replace the old covenant with a *better covenant absolutely free of charge* (Heb. 7:19; 8:6,7,13). That’s planned obsolescence at its finest!

It is because we have such a glorious message of grace that Paul says “we use great plainness of speech” (II Cor. 3:12). When salesmen try to sell something that is *not* good, they use great *vagueness* of speech in an attempt to make their product sound better than it is! But when it comes to the gospel of grace, our “product” could not *be* any better, and so with nothing to hide, ministers can use great plainness of speech to describe it. And so if the reader is praying about entering the ministry, but you are concerned about your lack of eloquence, God wants you to know here and now that your very ineloquence renders

you eminently qualified to proclaim a message that He says *should* be declared with “great plainness of speech”!

In contrast, God would not let Moses use plain speech when it came to the covenant that *he* ministered (II Cor. 3:13), for God knew even as He was giving the law that eventually it was to be “done away” (v. 7). We know this because when God gave him the law, Moses put a veil on his face “that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the *end* of that which is *abolished*” (v. 13). We know that the fading glory of Moses’ face was symbolic of the law that would eventually fade away because these words “end” and “abolished” are used in other places of the law (Rom. 10:4; Eph. 2:15). And so Moses veiled his face so that they could not see this symbolic prediction of the eventual fading of the Law.

But why could God not plainly tell them that someday the old testament law would fade and be replaced by new testament grace? Well, in the face of Israel’s resolute declarations that they could *keep* the Law (Ex. 19:8; 24:3,7), God—who knew better—decided to give them ample time to learn by experi-

ence that they could not. Just as sinners today are not ready to receive God’s grace until they are convinced of their inability to earn salvation by the works of the Law, God knew that Israel would not be ready to receive new testament grace until they too were convinced of their inability to meet God’s perfect standards as expressed in the Law.

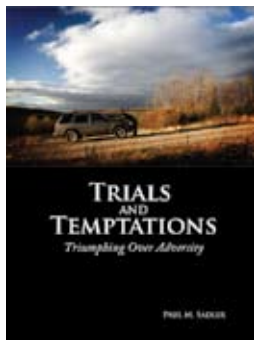
But there was yet another reason why God could not plainly tell them that the Law would someday need replacing. You see, He was not yet ready to reveal the new testament secret of how the just demands of the Law would be met when Christ died for our sins. But the secret of how God could be “just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus” (Rom. 3:26) has been out for nearly 2,000 years now! The veil of secrecy has been lifted, and it is time for ministers to use great plainness of speech to get this blessed message of grace out to a lost and dying world!

“Seeing then that we have such hope” (II Cor. 3:12), we invite the reader who has the “desire” to enter the ministry (I Tim. 3:1) to begin to make preparations *today* for a lifetime of service for Christ. Even the world knows that the secret of a rich and fulfilling life is to *follow your passion*. If you are passionate about the preaching of Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the mystery, *follow your passion!* Time will tell if this is your calling in life. But you don’t want to spend the rest of your life wondering if God could have used *you* to stem the tide of apostasy in Christendom as the pastor of a local church.

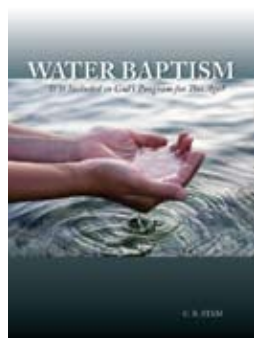
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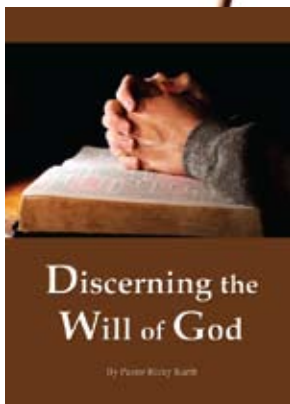
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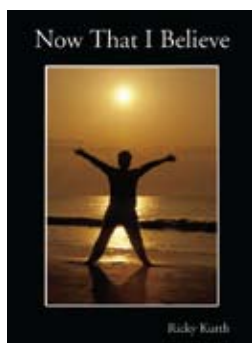
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BBS Letter Excerpts

From our Inbox:

“Thank you for continuing to supply me with the *Searchlight*. I am getting a lot of spiritual insight which has lifted up my level of witnessing for Christ and defending Bible doctrine.”

From Missouri:

“I am listening to your studies on your web site...I’m going to teach tomorrow night on what I learned from you this week.”

From our Inbox:

“I had never heard about mid-Acts dispensationalism for most of my life, but am now about 90% in agreement.”

From Kenya:

“After reading your *Berean Searchlight*, I dearly request you to send me some more editions to enable me to have a deeper understanding of the Bible. I am convinced you are the right people to make me understand the exegesis in the Bible. I am a Pentecostal pastor in Kenya who would like to bring reformation in my church, which has more than 500 members.”

From Washington:

“Please send two sets of *What It Means to Be a Grace Believer* to me. I can’t wait to have them for people, including myself. It’s difficult for me to explain everything to people, so thanks to Paul Sadler for his wonderful work.”

From Ohio:

“Thanks again for the *Berean Searchlight* magazine. It gives us hope and insures our faith and trust in our Lord.”

From our Inbox:

“Thank you so much for your nourishing articles. I am missing them, so here is my new email address. Your work is greatly appreciated, and is being shared with many.”

From Washington:

“We just finished the *Growing Up in Grace* junior lesson on rightly dividing! My girls really are learning the wonderful grace message given to us by our pattern and example, the Apostle Paul.”

From our Inbox:

“Thank you very much!!! This is what I have been looking for for a long time...Thank you always for your help to me when I get myself in these Biblical scraps! © I really appreciate it.” (You’re welcome, Scrappy!—Ed).

From India:

“I am working in Orissa the state of India where many, many persecutions take place. Here the Australian missionary Graham Stains was burnt alive. But God is doing great things nowadays. Sir, I used to read your magazine, the *Berean Searchlight*, every month while I was in Kerala. It was a blessing for me, so please send me the magazine at my present address.”

From Colorado:

“Art Fowler visited me, and explained the grace message to me, as to how to ‘rightly divide’ God’s Word. I was suspicious of it so I set out to prove Art wrong, but ended up proving him right...rightly dividing God’s Word does eliminate all the confusion and contradictions that many people claim are in Scripture.”

From New Zealand:

“I’m no longer an ultra-dispensationalist, so I wish to unsubscribe to free you more resources to preach the gospel. Thanks for the free magazine, I did benefit from many of the studies. However, the theology of the *Berean Bible Society* is too unorthodox for my liking and tends to color all interpretations to be too black and white, including Christ Himself.”

From the Philippines:

“Never has the Scripture been as clear as it is now to me! I’m so happy that the Lord has revealed this to me through you. I’ve been praying for a local church here in my country where I could fellowship and worship with grace believers. Can you help me?” (We put her in touch with *Things To Come Mission*.—Ed).

From our Inbox:

“Thank you for continuing to send your *Searchlight*. I’m so blessed while I am reading them. It helps me to be strong of what we believe, the principle of ‘rightly dividing.’”

From Wyoming:

“Enjoyed our short time together at *Grace Chapel*. Your messages Pastor Sadler—both in the Adult Sunday School and Church service—were timely and much appreciated.”

From Florida:

“It was a blessing to receive your letter in response to my question about the Rapture. Those Scriptures that you provided helped out a lot, glory be to God! Also I just finished Mr. Stam’s commentary on Thessalonians, and that also helped to clear up a lot of questions that I had.”

From Nigeria:

“I am profoundly grateful for the accurate systematic presentation of your teachings on ‘the gospel of grace.’ The teachings portray the transforming power of the grace of God...I am blessed by reading your publication ‘the *Berean Searchlight*,’ and since I started reading it, my life has never been the same.”

From Wisconsin:

“Your editorial jumped off the page at me when you quoted Pastor Stam’s comments about being occupied with the bad news of today and the last few months. I must confess that this has commanded much of my attention lately, causing a laziness as far as the Lord’s work is concerned. Enclosed is a small contribution.”

From the Virgin Islands:

“Your faithfulness in ‘rightly dividing’ is a source of strength and peace in this world of spiritual Babel. Thank you.”

From Florida:

“Thank you for faithfully proclaiming the wonderful gospel of the grace of God, which was revealed to the Apostle Paul by divine revelation. I have and continue to be blessed by your ministry and faithfulness. May our Lord show His hand on His wonderful work.”



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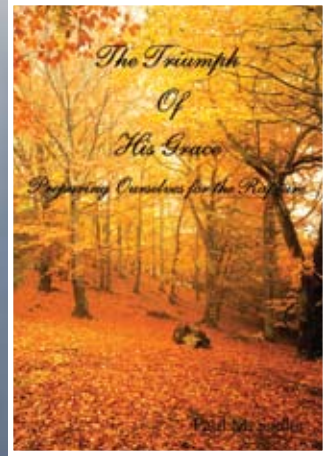
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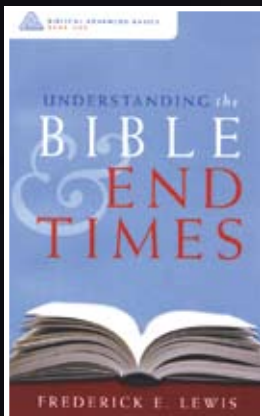
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Our cover this month features a photo taken by Ken and Barb Wardius, a couple who travel extensively in search of unique photo opportunities. You can view some of their impressive gallery of photographs and e-mail them with any questions at their website: www.crestwoodcreek.com.



The *Cana Island Lighthouse* is located in Bailey's Harbor, Wisconsin. The station is situated in a very exposed location. During the "Alpena Gale," a violent storm in 1880, the waves broke over the top of the keeper's house and the spray reached the windows of the lantern level.

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“If grace couldn’t be abused, it wouldn’t be grace! But because
grace is grace, it shouldn’t be abused!” —Jim Kirkwood
“Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?” (Rom. 6:1).

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