

Bible Study #6 ***The Gospel of Grace***

God becomes powerless before human freedom; He cannot violate it since it flows from His own omnipotence. Certainly man was created by the will of God alone; but he cannot be deified by it alone. A single will for creation, but two for deification. A single will to raise up the image, but two to make the image into a likeness.

Vladimir Lossky

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Paul of Tarsus

1.

If Christianity is to teach humankind how to achieve union with God [*theosis*], then a viable solution must be inherent in Christianity's underlying constructs that resolves ancient paganism's (and modern Islam's) problem of *how good must a human being become to be good enough for mortal flesh to put on immortality*. That solution is postulated in the Gospel of Grace, but what exactly constitutes this *good news* of God? What is Grace? Is it all gifts of a divine creator to humankind, including life and the evils associated with life? Is it salvation from the grave, the enemy that humankind cannot otherwise defeat? Is it unmerited favor? Or unmerited pardon? While most Christians agree that people are saved by Grace, Christians do not agree that humankind is born in a state of sin. Thus, the justification for why salvation is essential also differs—and with these differences come several concepts of what is Grace, and the Gospel of Grace.

The epistles of the Apostle Paul were written to existing churches or to ministers already in the field. It is these epistles that most refer to Grace; it is also from these epistles that today's Christianity takes hold of a theology that is *antinomian* in application. And here, before proceeding further, a brief study of *anomia*, Strong's word # 458, must be undertaken: this Greek word appears sixteen times in Scripture, and in the King James Authorized Version, it is most often translated as "iniquity" [twelve times]. It has the denotative meaning of the condition of *being without law* because the person is ignorant of the law, or because the person violates the law. It also includes in its connotative meaning contempt of the law, wickedness, evildoing, and the implementation of being without law. It is used in Matthew 7:23, where modern translations render it into English as workers of *lawlessness*. And with modern translations rendering *anomia* as /*lawlessness*/, the *antinomian* practices of endtime *dispensationalist* fellowships have a greater challenge than ever before them, for when Jesus answered His disciples questions about the end of the age, He said, "And because *lawlessness* will be increased, the love of many will grow cold" (Matt 24:12); so with *dispensationalist* theology seeping into all corners of the world, lawlessness increases worldwide.

For Jesus *lawlessness* is the antithesis of love. As *lawlessness* rises, love diminishes. Jesus' disciples will be known for the love they have for one another. Therefore, Jesus' disciples will be known for keeping the precepts of the law that lead to spiritual circumcision (Rom 2:26-29). Those spiritual Israelites who identify themselves as disciples of Christ Jesus but do not keep the precepts of the law will be the ones whose love has grown cold in the latter days—and they will be the “many.” And about the juxtaposition of keeping the precepts of the law and knowing Jesus, the Apostle John wrote,

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. *He is the propitiation for our sins*, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. *Whoever says “I know him” but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected.* By this we may be sure that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked. (1 John 2:1-6 — emphasis added)

As the accepted sin offering [propitiation] (also, Rom 8:3-4) for the whole world, Christ Jesus is both a disciple's advocate and covering. But the disciple does not know Jesus and actually denies Jesus—and will be denied by Jesus—if the disciple does not keep His commandments.

When doing a Bible study, there are times to pause to reflect upon concepts that can pass by too quickly. Now is one of those times, for the Apostle Paul writes, “So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law” (Rom 2:26)—what is keeping *the precepts of the law* if not keeping the law beginning with the inside of the person and not outward only, but desiring to keep the law. Is it not keeping the law with the heart and mind that rule over the hand and the body? It certainly isn't doing the minimum that the law requires. It is voluntarily (because the person is uncircumcised) fulfilling the principles of a law that the person would not—if the person remained a part of the world—otherwise do, or desire to do. Thus, if this uncircumcised person [male or female, for both are equals in uncircumcision] keeps the concepts of the law, will not the person's “uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision ... for no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical” (*vv.* 26, 28). And with this statement, the Apostle Paul makes himself extremely controversial, because the promise of salvation seemed to go to the physically circumcised descendants of the patriarch Abraham. Paul opens that promise to everyone who keeps, not by obligation but voluntarily and by faith, the precepts of the law—and this opening of the promise of salvation is the Gospel of Grace. The only person who remains excluded from salvation is the person who does not keep the precepts of the law (Rom 2:12-16). In other words, the person excluded is the person who lives as an *antinomian*, because this person has either heard the law but chose not to keep it, or because this person did not choose to do by nature those things that the law require.

Where is Grace in salvation if even the person who was never under the law must do the things that the law requires ... Grace is in blotting out the the record of debt with its legal demand of death that stood against every disciple (Col 2:14) while the disciple remained a part of the world; i.e., remained a son [or daughter] of disobedience (Eph

2:1-3). Grace is now in putting on daily the garment of Christ Jesus' righteousness (Gal 3:27), a garment that cloaks the disciples with the brilliance of the sun (Rev 12:1) so that the disciple's shortfalls cannot be seen in the heavenly realm. Grace is not, however, permission to live as an *antinomian*, for the person who teaches lawlessness denies Jesus, and Jesus will deny knowing the person in his or her resurrection (Matt 7:21-23) despite mighty works done by the person in Jesus' name.

God consigned all of humanity to disobedience so that He could have mercy on all (Rom 11:32). This mercy is cancelling the *record book of sin*, or *certificate of sin-indebtedness* [the Greek term */cheirophonon/*, used in Scripture only in Col 2:14] that stood against every son of disobedience because God had consigned the person to disobedience. God did this (i.e., consign humankind to disobedience) when He drove Adam and Eve from His garden. He delivered humankind to the Adversary "for the destruction of the flesh so that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord" (1Co 5:5). The Apostle's instructions to the church at Corinth is not a new command, but shows Paul's awareness of what *Elohim* [singular in usage] did in Genesis 3:22-24.

Because of a lingering atmosphere of Platonism existing throughout the Hellenistic world, the early Christian churches (especially in Asia, where all left Paul [2 Tim 1:15]) could not conceive what Moses recorded in the Genesis temptation account, that humankind was driven from the garden of God **before** Adam or Eve could eat of the Tree of Life, that Adam and Eve had no life but that which came from the breath *Elohim* [singular] breathed into Adam's nostrils (Gen 2:7), thereby causing Adam to be a *naphesh* or breathing creature as the beasts of the fields are breathing creatures. This is why King Solomon wrote that God was then testing the children of men so that they might see that they themselves are beasts (Eccl 3:18-20). The Apostle Paul, schooled in the Hebraic traditions of Moses, did not understand, nor believe that Adam received an immortal soul when *Elohim* [singular] breathed into his nostrils. Rather, the Genesis account clearly states that Adam was driven from the garden before he could eat of the Tree of Life, not after. Therefore, because the traditions of Moses run directly counter to the traditions of neo-Platonic philosophers, a parting of company was inevitable over the foundational issue of whether humankind is physically born with immortal souls—and every understanding of Grace derives from where the person positions himself or herself on this foundational issue.

The first Eve believed the serpent when it said, "You will not surely die" (Gen 3:4), and the last Eve believed that old serpent, Satan the devil, when he said through pagan philosophers, *You will not surely die for you have an immortal soul*. And since even the Asia [Minor] fellowships that left Paul could not deny that Paul was a chosen vessel to deliver the gospel of Christ to these Gentile fellowships, they erased as much of Moses as they could from the Apostle, substituting in the place of Moses the best of Plato. Thus, these fellowships missed seeing that in the passages where the Roman Church finds its doctrine of *original sin*, and where the Greek Church finds a fallen relationship (as does Judaism) is the concept of "natural grace," where no sin is imputed to human beings who are without knowledge of sin—in Paul's treatise to the saints at Rome is the physical shadow of spiritual Grace, and is it from the shadow that endtime saints learn, for them, what is the most relevant detail of spiritual Grace: it has an ending date.

The Apostle wrote:

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—for sin

indeed was in the world before the law was given, **but sin is not counted where there is no law**. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come. (Rom 5:12-14 — emphasis added)

If sin is not counted as sin, then the sinner does not have the record of his or her sins with their legal demand for death, the *cheirographon*, remembered in the person's post-death judgment, for the person's death satisfied this record of sin even when the person willfully sinned. What advantage is there, then, of being born of Spirit under a Second Covenant that has as one of its promises the forgiveness of sin? What need is there for spiritual Grace? Why not remain a son of disobedience, mired in sin and sinfulness, serving the pleasures of sin for a season? Why not take everything the person can from this world? Why look for the coming of a city whose designer and builder is the Lord? Why live out of sync with the world?

Simply put, why become a Christian?

Is it because “death reigned from Adam to Moses”?

Then why not become a Jew if Moses brought an end to death ... perhaps here is where the flaw enters into the Gospel of Grace as taught by fellowships based on *solā scripturā*? For in the second covenant Moses mediated with Israel—this covenant made in addition to the covenant made at Horeb (Deu 29:1) and made with the mixed circumcised and uncircumcised nation (Rom 2:29)—spiritual circumcision is promised to the holy nation of Israel (Deu 30:6) when by faith (30:1-2) this nation returns to God, loving Him with hearts and minds, and keeping His laws and statutes. Unfortunately, the nation never did this prior to the birth of Jesus of Nazareth so death continued to reign until the coming of the last Adam.

The Christian fellowship holding a theology *antinomian* in application needs to return to the foundation the Apostle Paul laid (1Co 3:10-11) and reexamine its traditions.

Christian dogmas develop from the traditions of the Church. Catholic faiths, both Greek and Roman, generally make tradition equal to Scripture when deciding issues of salvation—they claim that through direct apostolic succession the oral teachings of the early years of the Church became established traditions, and that the collection of texts forming the Bible comes from these established traditions, not the other way around. Their claim is that the choice of which texts to admit into the Bible comes from which texts are in agreement with these established traditions, with the final form of the Bible still not being finalized when Augustine wrote *On Christian Doctrine* despite contrary claims made by 18th-Century theologians. Thus, the claim of Catholic faiths is that Scripture alone does not contain all of the knowledge needed for salvation, that the faiths derived from direct apostolic succession hold in their traditions a significant portion of revealed knowledge, that the canonical law of these faiths is as valid and binding upon Christians as any law recorded in Scripture, that all teachers within the umbrella of Christianity must be judged by how their teachings line up with the traditions of the Church.

However, the Apostle Paul wrote that he laid, on the cornerstone Christ Jesus, the foundation of the Church (again, 1Co 3:10-11), and that the fellowships in Asia had turned away from him (again, 2Tim 1:15) but that the “firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: “The Lord knows those who are his” (2Tim 2:19). In another place, he wrote, “For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as

enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with their minds set on earthly things” (Phil 3:18-19). So the early traditions of fellowships in Asia, especially, were not of Paul nor of Christ Jesus after, say, mid-1st Century CE. So how can the traditions that determined which texts would be admitted into the Bible be of the Christ from whom these fellowships had turned away?

Again, the disciple needs to pause for a moment: what was it that Augustine wrote concerning traditions and the Bible? Perhaps this is knowledge every disciple should have—

In *On Christian Doctrine* (ca 396 CE), Book II, Sec. VIII [D.W. Robertson, Jr. translation], the learned Augustine wrote:

12. But let us turn our attention to the third step which I have decided to treat as the Lord may direct my discourse. He will be the most expert investigator of the Holy Scripture who has first read all of them [texts constituting Scripture] and has some knowledge of them, at least through reading them if not through understanding them. That is, he should read those that are said to be canonical. For he may read the others more securely when he has been instructed in the truth of the faith so that they may not preoccupy a weak mind nor, deceiving it with vain lies and fantasies, prejudice it with something contrary to sane understanding. **In the matter of canonical Scriptures he should follow the authority of the greater number of catholic Churches, among which are those which have deserved to have apostolic seats and to receive epistles. He will observe this rule concerning canonical Scriptures, that he will prefer those accepted by all catholic Churches to those which some do not accept; among those which are not accepted by all, he should prefer those which are accepted by the largest number of important Churches to those held by a few minor Churches of less authority. If he discovers that some are maintained by the larger number of Churches, other by the Churches of weightiest authority, although this condition is not likely, he should hold them to be of equal value.** [emphasis added]

The endtime disciple here notes that when Augustine wrote in 396 CE, no central authority existed within the Christian Church to establish by weight of its declaration something as important as what books should be canonical. The Church was democratic. No papacy existed. Instead, the Church was organized much as the Orthodox Church exists today. Thus, disciples need to jettison the idea that the Roman Church is invested with any power not received from the spiritual king of Babylon.

The paragraph following the above citation from *On Christian Doctrine* [paragraph 13] will be attached as appendix A to this Bible Study. This paragraph contains a listing of books Augustine recommends, and the endtime disciple should note that even with a listing of books contained in today’s Bible, the list was not finalized or canonical. The Bible wasn’t established as a completed work, but an ongoing collection of texts representing the words of God. Therefore, at the end of the 4th-Century CE, the Bible was not subject to the elevated status afforded it when *solā scripturā* rang as the Reformed Church’s rallying cry in the 16th-Century.

How does this relate to the Gospel of Grace? If death reigned until Moses, yet sin was not counted as sin until Moses, then Moses becomes the fulcrum on which salvation teeters. Salvation doesn’t rotate around Plato, or the teachings of neo-Platonists. It was

these teachings that caused fellowships in Asia to leave Paul while he was yet alive; for neither Jew nor Gentile understood Moses or kept the law (John 7:19, with Rom 9:31-32). In the context of circumcision on the 8th-day superseding the Sabbath commandment, Jesus compared healing a man's whole body with spiritual circumcision (John 7:22-23), just as Paul in the context of death reigning until Moses said that the first Adam was a type of Jesus coming as the last Adam (Rom 5:14, with 1Co 15:45) ... physical circumcision is a shadow and type of spiritual circumcision. Likewise, physical grace [i.e., when sin is not counted as sin] is a shadow and type of spiritual Grace. And as physical grace extended from Adam to Moses, spiritual Grace extends from the coming of the last Adam to the coming of a last Moses (Moses and Aaron, together, foreshadow the two endtime witnesses). Therefore, spiritual Grace begins with the divine Breath of God the Father [*Pneuma 'Agion*] descending as a dove and remaining on the man Jesus of Nazareth (Matt 3:16-17). It ends with the measuring of the temple of God in the heavenly city of Jerusalem; it ends with the beginning of the ministry of the two witnesses (Rev 11:1-3). It ends when the Son of Man is revealed (Luke 17:26-30). It ends when the holy nation of Israel is liberated from the law of sin and death that presents dwells in the flesh of every spiritually circumcised disciple (Rom 7:21-25); it ends when Israel is empowered by the Holy Spirit in the manner visibly foreshadowed by the events recorded in Acts chapter 2. It ends when the seven endtime years of tribulation begin. It ends so that the Body of Christ can become the Bride of Christ, for no man (despite how much he loves his body) marries himself.

Physical grace ended with the giving of the law from atop Mount Sinai. It ended when the holy nation of Israel received through the hearing of ears knowledge of the laws of God; for with knowledge came responsibility. The Apostle Paul knew what sin was because with physical circumcision, he received instruction in keeping the commandments (Rom 7:7). But knowledge of what sin is does not prevent any person from sinning; rather, it seems to have the opposite effect (*vv.* 8-10). So with the ending of natural grace—when sin that had lain dead in Paul's mind became alive—came the need for a sacrifice for sin. And the wealth of the holy nation of God was consumed in the slaughter of bulls and goats. Literally, sin devoured the nation, a reality that has been underappreciated by endtime disciples.

The burden of sin bankrupted a people that pursued by works the law that would have led to righteous if pursued by faith. Therefore, recognizing the futility of works, the Christian fellowships in Asia, drunk on the heady wine of Greek philosophy, used the Jerusalem Conference to divorce Christianity from Moses. After all, had not Paul written in his epistle to the saints at Ephesus, "For by grace you have been saved through faith" (2:8)? Indeed, he had. And had not the Jerusalem Council sent the following letter to Hellenistic believers,

The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the brothers [and sisters] who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings. Since we have heard that some persons have gone out from us and troubled you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions, it has seemed good to us, having come to one accord, to choose men and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ. **We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth.** For it has seemed good to the Holy

Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immortality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell. (Acts 15:23-29 — emphasis added)

What same things? Exactly what the letter said, or what the Jerusalem Council said? The letter addressed only part of what James said, for the conclusion of James' judgment is this: "For from ancient generations Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues" (Acts 15:21). This is the portion of the Council's judgment that Judas and Silas, along with Barnabus and Paul, would relay by *word of mouth*. And the implication of James' judgment is that Greek converts only need to do the four things before they can enter into fellowship with disciples who continue to hear Moses read every Sabbath, that whatever else beyond the four things that Greek converts need to know as they grow in grace and knowledge will come through hearing Moses read every Sabbath.

How exactly did Hellenistic converts in Asia receive the Council's letter? Did they assume that as Christians they needed to do only the four things that cleaned them up enough that they wouldn't get stoned when they entered a synagogue to hear Moses read, that they didn't need to do anything beyond these four things? That is how many endtime fellowships—governed by *solā scripturā*—have received James' judgment. They don't know what Judas and Silas said, and they don't care; for whatever Judas and Silas orally told these fellowships is extra-textual material and is not part of Scripture. Therefore, operating on the principle of *solā scripturā*, these *dispensationalist* fellowships teach doctrines that are *antinomian* in theory and in application.

Again pause for a moment: what degree of faith is necessary for a Greek living as a Greek to turn to God, profess that Jesus is Lord, and cease living as a Greek, cease eating blood, cease eating meats that were strangled so as to retain the blood, cease eating meats offered to idols, cease frequenting prostitutes, and begin entering the synagogue on the Sabbath day to hear Moses read? Is the above degree of faith comparable to the faith of Abraham who left home and kin to journey to the Promised Land, the visible representation of God's rest (Ps 95:10-11)? The quality of the faith is comparable, isn't it?

Oral tradition, now, unfortunately assumes far more importance in what constitutes the house of God, the temple of the Most High, which consists of that body of believers hearing the words of Jesus and believing the one who sent Him (John 5:24), that house built with living stones (1 Pet 2:4-5) that is the temple (1Co 3:16-17) constructed in the heavenly city of Jerusalem. *Solā scripturā* works to erase false traditions, while also erasing traditions that should be kept. Therefore, while the eraser of *solā scripturā* had to be employed by the the remnant of spiritually circumcised Israel that left spiritual Babylon in the 16th-Century CE as Ezra and Nehemiah left physical Babylon by order of Cyrus, king of Persia and Babylon, this eraser also restricts spiritual growth to suckling status. For Paul wrote, "But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, for you are still of the flesh" (1Co 3:1-3). So the subject matter contained in Paul's first epistle to the saints at Corinth as well as what he orally taught them is milk, the food of infants. And the writer of Hebrews said, "You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness,

since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil” (Heb 5:12-14).

Again, the disciple needs to pause and reflect: solid food is for those disciples who, by training, can distinguish good from evil. And how does a disciple receive such training? To what schoolmaster can a disciple go for this training? The Apostle tells all disciples:

So then, the law was our guardian [or tutor, or tutor-slave, or schoolmaster] until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. (Gal 3:24-26)

The law is the tutor that teaches disciples how to distinguish good from evil—and the law is needed for as long as the disciple remains *unskilled in the word of righteousness*. A newly born-of-Spirit disciple, like a newborn human infant, cannot swallow and digest solid food, but needs the milk that is contained in *solā scripturā* where traditions of all sorts have been erased. But it would seem extremely odd for an adolescent to be suckling his or her mother’s breasts. Except where there is some sort of a character impairment, a child is weaned while still small. Historically, a child was weaned when he or she leaves the nursery. Thus, milk is for the very young—and for Evangelical Christians with their 24/7 satellite telecasts.

What some Greek Church and Roman Church theologians have seen as the 480 year-old fruit of Protestantism and *sola scriptura* (i.e., the countless, literally, denominations of the Evangelical Church with their nullifying doctrines) is in actuality the casualties and litter of the return trek of spiritual Israelites from Babylon to Jerusalem. The spiritual king of Babylon officially took the Christian Church captive in 325 CE at the Council of Nicea, a lovely Black Sea resort community that in June made surrendering extremely palatable to bishops focused on the flesh. And for twelve centuries, spiritual Israelites dwelt in Babylon as slaves to lawlessness, but slaves that enjoyed the pleasures of sin for a season. Finally, though, a heavenly decree went out to send a remnant of Israel back to the city where the Apostle Paul had laid the foundation for the spiritual house of God before the churches in Asia left him. The way was far; the trek long and hard. And yes, the stench of the dead and dying corpses is terrible—and is a stench that will continue to befoul all of Christianity as the pillars of the house of God are stood in the 21st-Century on that foundation Paul laid so long ago.

The journey of the spiritually circumcised remnant that left spiritual Babylon was not across desert wastelands, mountains and rivers—physical geography—as was the journey of the physically circumcised remnant of Israel. Rather, the journey has been through ideas and traditions to again find the foundation Paul laid in the heavenly city of Jerusalem. The journey began as a historical trek as if the remnant were Christian reenactors attempting to recover a bygone era, but for reenacting the traditions of the 3rd-Century, both the Roman Church and the Reformed Church persecuted this Anabaptist remnant, drowning as many of its leaders as they could catch. It took faith to erase with *solā scripturā* those traditions that were built on early foundations—and it was this faith that is counted to this remnant as righteousness.

This Anabaptist remnant were zealous for God, but their journey was too far for any of them to complete in a lifetime. Their faith took them beyond the walls of spiritual Babylon, but not across the Jordan. Only Oswald Glaidt and Andreas Fischer and a few others whose names have not been preserved entered into spiritual Judea and came

close to making the trek. Few disciples followed these two pioneers of faith that blazed the trail to the spiritual Land Beyond the River.

Herein lies a problem that *solā scripturā* complicated on the journey from Babylon to heavenly Jerusalem: what happens to the Gospel of Grace once the traditions and canonical law of the Greek Church and of the Roman Church are scoured away? Does this Gospel not become what it was accused of being in the 1st-Century? When Paul went to Jerusalem, he saw James and the elders there—and upon Paul reporting the things that God had done among the Gentiles, James and the elders said to Paul,

You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed. They are all zealots for the law, and ***they have been told about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses***, telling them not to circumcise their children or walk according to our customs. What then is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come. Do therefore what we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow; take these men and purify yourself along with them and pay their expenses, so that they may shave their heads. ***Thus all will know that there is nothing in what they have been told about you, but that you yourself also live in observance of the law.*** But as for the Gentiles who have believed, we have sent a letter with our judgment that they should abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. (Acts 21:20-25 — emphasis added)

It was enough for the Gentiles to, by faith, abstain from their former practices, their former traditions, but the circumcised Israelite didn't abandon his practices. Rather, this circumcised Israelite added faith to the traditions he had received from Moses by professing that Jesus was Lord, and believing that the Father had raised Jesus from the dead (Rom 10:9). In both cases, it is the act of faith that caused the person to leave one tradition that conflicted with the laws of God and to take on another tradition that was in agreement with the precepts of the law, or to add a new tradition to a tradition that did not conflict with the laws of God. It was this act of faith that was counted to the person as righteousness.

The Gospel of Grace is a Gospel of Faith, with the patriarch Abraham being the touchstone for the degree or quality of faith needed to be counted as righteousness. Abraham believed God to the degree that he would not withhold from God even the son of promise. Therefore, the dead faith of too many endtime Christians will, of necessity, cause God to challenge that faith with martyrdom.

For every disciple, the received tradition serves as the disciple's starting point on a journey of faith that is spiritually [or mentally] as Abraham's journey was physically from his geographical home to the Promised Land. On this post-captivity side of spiritual Israel having been sent into Babylonian captivity at the Council of Nicea, the journey will be back toward the faith and traditions of the 1st-Century Church. So the remnant of spiritually circumcised Israel that left Babylon had to literally trek back across the traditions of the 3rd-Century CE Church to come to the traditions of the 2nd-Century Church, when God was two, not three. And this trek across the trenches of tradition has been long and difficult. Many disciples stopped to build houses for themselves along the way—and continue to stay stopped as if the faith of their forebearers is good enough for them. Well, it isn't. The faith of Menno Simons and those

he disciplined was sufficient for that faith to be counted to them as righteousness. But that faith does nothing for a 6th, 7th, or 8th generation Mennonite.

Again, a brief pause is in order: a rich young ruler came to Jesus and asked what he must do to inherit everlasting life (Luke 18:18). Jesus told the ruler that he knew the commandments [as if in the commandments were life], and the young ruler said that he had kept these commandments since he was a child ... where is faith in keeping the traditions of parents? Abraham might as well have stayed in Ur. And knowing the problem, Jesus said, “Sell all they you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me” (v. 22). Selling all that he had would have required faith in God providing for the young man, as would following Jesus require faith. Two acts of faith bound up in one sentence—the rich young ruler lacked the faith required to be counted as righteousness. But this was not so for 1st generation Anabaptists, or for 1st generation Christians in Hellenistic Asia Minor.

James says that faith without works is dead faith (Jas 2:14-17). Saying that one believes in Christ is a good starting point for an action of faith comparable to Abraham journeying to the Promised Land, the geographical representation of God’s rest (again, Ps 95:10-11) for which the weekly Sabbath is the *between heaven and earth* transitional representation (Heb 3:16-4:11).

Therefore, in endtime Mennonite fellowships are disciples who lack the faith of their ancestors [of my ancestors, too]. In these fellowships are disciples who lack the faith that can be counted as righteousness, and who now seem content to remain stopped in 3rd-Century traditions where they plant fields and build barns. Their ancestors’ faith got these fellowships a little ways outside of Babylon, but there the journey stopped—and the faith of disciples in these endtime fellowships is not strong enough to get the disciples or the fellowships all the way to the heavenly city of Jerusalem. So now they hope to find a shortcut around keeping the precepts of the law, but no shortcut exists. All they will find is a lake of fire because this present generation of Mennonites and Brethren have grown weary of well-doing and have grown weak in faith. For which of them will leave home and kin and journey into a Sabbath-keeping fellowship, any?

In the 17th-Century some of the Brethren returned to keeping the 7th-day Sabbath as the remnant that left Babylon waded the spiritual Jordan to enter Judea—this remnant then continued the spiritual trek across the traditions of the 2nd-Century Church, and soon returned to looking forward to Christ Jesus’ immediate return [the Advent movement of the first half of the 19th-Century]. This remnant was in Judea and looking for the Jerusalem to come. It took faith (as well as being the butt of many jokes) to look for Christ to return after being gone for so many centuries, and this faith was again counted as righteous.

- The faith of the person who was baptized as an adult in the first half and middle of the 16th-Century was the degree of faith that was counted as righteous.
- The faith of the Anabaptist who left the old world and moved to America in the 17th-Century was the degree of faith that could be counted as righteousness.
- The faith of the Anabaptist who rejected the Trinity was the degree of faith that could be counted as righteousness.
- The faith of the Anabaptist who began keeping the 7th-day Sabbath was the degree of faith that could be counted as righteousness.

- The faith of the now Baptist who forsook worldly wealth in expectation of the Advent of Christ was the degree of faith that could be counted as righteousness.
- Therefore, after the middle of the 19th-Century, the journey of the remnant that left spiritual Babylon had returned to the faith of fellowships in the first part of the 2nd-Century CE. And for these disciples, this faith was counted as righteousness.

But all of Asia had left Paul by the middle of the 6th decade of the 1st-Century. The Christian fellowships throughout the Hellenistic world were riddled with theological errors, some caused by the atmosphere of Platonism breathed by these disciples, some caused by the same misapplication through misunderstanding of the letter from the Jerusalem Conference as endtime disciples see. And in comparison, the remnant that left Babylon stumbled over over misteachings as both the Seventh Day Adventists who accepted the teachings of Ellen G. White, and the Adventists who rejected Ms White and organized as the Church of God, 7th Day, sought the heavenly city of Jerusalem.

Two traditions of the faith left the 19th-Century. One tradition built hospitals and did good works based on the teachings of a prophetess. The other tradition continued to divide into even smaller splinters until just prior to the Depression, when the Radio Church of God was born from the energetic work of Herbert Armstrong. And a defining pattern emerged that would be seen after Armstrong's death in 1986: the remnant that continued toward the heavenly city was not ever a stable organization. When stability entered, the remnant's spiritual journey stopped. And this was the case when the Radio Church of God became the Worldwide Church of God. After 1962, this organization ceased its journey towards spiritual Jerusalem, and as with a dying tree, this organization began to set much fruit in the form of number of new members.

But as with a dying tree, the growth was temporary.

Armstrong's inability to understand spiritual birth prevented either him or his derivative fellowships from finding and building on the foundation that the Apostle Paul laid in heavenly Jerusalem; however, the remnant that left spiritual Babylon in 1525 CE was now firmly established in spiritual Judea ... well, maybe not firmly established, for following Armstrong's death, the Adversary lured more than half of his organization back to Babylon, where the dates are sweet and the halls are filled with praise music.

A young tree grows quickly and almost invisibly in a forest, and so it is with the remnant that now builds on the foundation the Apostle laid. The wilderness of Christian voices to which Greek and Roman catholic theologians point when identifying the fruit of *solā scripturā* is the same forest that today conceals the hewing of living stones into the walls and pillars of the temple of God. And the faith that supports the Grace by which these disciples are saved—the faith that will be counted as these disciples' righteousness—comes from being joined to a sapling, small and of little strength in a forest of majestic giants, all with budgeted millions for 24/7 television broadcasts.

The Gospel of Grace is the good news that by faith those who did not pursue righteousness have attained it (Rom 9:30); for the uncircumcised person who by faith keeps the precepts of the law has his or her uncircumcision counted as circumcision. The Gospel of Grace is, therefore, the good news that faith in God supplies righteousness that no work of the hand or the body can. But the Gospel of Grace also contains within itself the necessity for every disciple to actively live by a degree of faith similar to that

displayed by Abraham when he left home and kin to journey to the geographical representation of God's rest.

Historically, the heavenly city of Jerusalem was without inhabitants for the twelve plus centuries when all of spiritually circumcised Israel dwelt in spiritual Babylon, the city that encompasses the physical world. Grammatico-historical exegesis kept the holy nation in Babylon: the incomprehensible logic of no less than Thomas Aquinas teetering over the Sabbath being grounded in natural law (and by extension, moral law) or abolished by Grace prevented any serious consideration of returning to spiritual Judea until the fullness of the exile was complete. And the traditions of the Greek and Roman catholic churches prevented from inclusion in the Bible any texts that were not so foundational that they could not be excluded as canonical. Thus, *solā scripturā* erased traditions that were not spiritual milk, and returned the remnant journeying to the heavenly city back to Judea where most of this remnant mills about as thirsty cattle unable to sniff water—calves trying to suckle cows with dry bags and shrunken teats.

The house of God will be built on the foundation Paul laid, but built through new traditions that look upward, not outward across the plains of Babylon. Others have attempted to build these new traditions without first locating the foundation Paul laid. One great constructionist was the previously mentioned Ellen G. White, who never appreciated the disparity in power between Satan and God. Satan reigns over spiritual Babylon through the providence of God. When it comes time for the Ancient of Days to take the kingdom of the world from Satan, all the Adversary will be able to do is speak mighty words against God—and those words will be spoken by the mind of a man that will be given to Satan (as the mind of a beast was given to King Nebuchadnezzar) when he is cast from heaven (Rev 12:9-10).

Another great constructionist also previously mentioned was Herbert W. Armstrong, who searched for the endtime nation of Israel in the dust of the earth, finding finally himself and his family history. He was given years to grow in grace and knowledge, then a nineteen year timecycle to quit thinking physically and begin thinking spiritually. But he didn't utilize his allotted years to locate the foundation Paul laid. Instead, in his hubris he began building on the tiny square of spiritual Jerusalem he had located by his weeks of diligent, indepth study in the Portland, Oregon, public library. And build he did. But his work had no more permanency than the radio waves over which he broadcast. It has come to less than nothing in that he has "set up" a generation of disciples to worship Satan when he is cast down, for Satan will be cast down when Armstrong prophesied that Christ Jesus will return—and Satan will come claiming to be *the Christ*.

Only one structure can be built atop the foundation that Paul laid—and the Gospel of Grace is an *offhand* expression for describing the traditions of faith that will be counted as righteousness when Christ Jesus returns. These traditions will have disciples keeping the precepts of the law by faith, and will have second generation disciples (that is, children who have grown up keeping the precepts of the law) following Christ as missionaries after the order of Timothy, to whom Paul addressed two pastoral epistles. Nothing less for them will be an act of faith equivalent to Abraham leaving home and kin—with the exception of martyrdom.

Yes, martyrdom will return on a scale not today imagined, for too many endtime disciples have grown up comfortably in a tradition of faith far from the Jerusalem above. But God will not neglect them. They will have an opportunity to express the faith of

Abraham, the faith of Anabaptist ancestors, the faith of Adventists when scorned by the world. And most will rebel against God, saying some illogical words about *my God would not require that of me*. If your God doesn't, then your God is not the God of Abraham, who asked the patriarch to sacrifice both of his sons, the first to abandonment, the second to death.

The Gospel of Grace is the good news that by faith, the disciple will be saved.

Also, understand well what the Apostle Paul writes: the Bible that Christians received from fellowships based on the milk-tradition taught to them by the Apostle is itself the milk of God's word, and not the meat; is itself merely the foundation of the spiritual house of God built in the heavenly Jerusalem. The disciple who argues for *solā scripturā* argues for milk. This disciple has not yet been weaned, but suckles the paps of the last Eve from inside her womb, if such a thing were possible. This disciple still needs his or her diaper changed, as evidenced by the sad demolition of the Protestant reform into a theological stench that oozes down from worldwide satellite networks as the revolution that keeps on revolting. One revolution spinning off two stepsons: the Reformed Church, and the Anabaptists. And concealed from public view by the Reformed Church's shower of sparks that ignited a 16th-Century musket loaded with pamphlets and pamphleteers is the remnant of spiritual Israel that left Babylon to rebuild the house of God in the heavenly city as Ezra and Nehemiah left physical Babylon to rebuilt a physical house of God in physical Jerusalem. This remnant is now at work, building on the foundation Paul laid.

Meanwhile, the disciple who argues for the traditions of the early Church now eats the blue mold of the cheese made from the milk fed those 1st-Century fellowships by the Apostle Paul: the disciple who argues for early traditions and for canonical law stemming from those traditions also argues for the lawlessness that initially sent the Church into captivity in spiritual Babylon, a captivity continued through grammatico-historical exegesis and through the authority of the Council of Nicea (ca 325 CE) ... yes, the Church was sent into spiritual captivity, but how can that be? The *how* is seen by when the Church attempts to enter God's rest. Just as the nation that left Egypt could not enter God's rest on the following day (Num chap 14 with Ps 95:10-11 & Heb 3:16-4:11) — rather than entering into God's rest, this circumcised nation wanted to return to Egypt — the spiritually circumcised Church cannot enter into God's rest on the following day. As the first died in the wilderness of Sin/Zin, the latter will die in sin. And the disciple who would leave spiritual Babylon will return to *solā scripturā*, and will begin constructing the house of God on the foundation Paul laid. For until the disciple builds on this foundation, the disciple drinks only milk.

The Lord knows those who are His—if He knows those who are His, then whose were all of those that turned away from the Apostle Paul in Asia? Were they not the Adversary's? Yes, they were. And it is from them that most of endtime Christianity comes. A disciple must, by faith, leave Greek and Roman catholic fellowships, must leave any fellowship that attempts to enter God's rest on the following day, and journey immediately to spiritual Judea. The way is marked, and a light has been burning in the heavenly city.

God is certainly not powerless when it comes to human freedom. Each of us has only enough freedom to choose life or death on a day of salvation. We have no more freedom than that, nor any less. So choose carefully, for the faith to choose life requires more of each of us than the lack of faith that causes a person to choose death.

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APPENDIX A

From Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine*, Book II, Sec. VIII [D.W. Robertson, Jr. translation]:

13. The whole canon of the Scriptures on which we say that this consideration of the step of knowledge should depend is contained in the following books: the five books of Moses, that is, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy; one book Josue [Joshua], one of Judges, one short book called Ruth which seems rather to pertain to the beginning of Kings; then the four books of Kings and two of Paralipomenon [Chronicles], not in sequence, but as if side by side and running at the same time. These are made up of history and are arranged according to the sequence of time and the order of things; there are others arranged in a different order which neither follow this order nor are connected among themselves, like Job, Tobias, Ester, Judith, two books of Maccabees, and two books of Esdras. The last two seem to follow the ordered history after the end of Kings or Paralipomenon, Then there are the prophets, among which are one book of the Psalms of David, and three books of Solomon: Proverbs, the Canticle of Canticles, and Ecclesiastes, are said to be Solomon's through a certain similitude, since it is consistently said that they were written by Jesus son of Sirach. Nevertheless, since they have merited being received as authoritative, they are to be numbered among the prophetic books. The remainder are those books called Prophets in a strict sense, containing twelve single books of Prophets joined together. Since they have never been separated, they are thought of as one. The names of the Prophets are Osee [Hosea], Joel, Amos, Abdias [Obadiah], Jonas, Micheas, Nahum, Habacuc, Sophonias, Aggeus, Zacharias, and Malachias. Then there are four books of four major Prophets: Isaias, Jermias, Daniel, Ezechiel. The authority of the Old Testament ends with these forty-four books. The New Testament contains the four evangelical books, according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; the fourteen epistles of Paul the Apostle, to the Romans, two to the Corinthians, to the Galatians, to the Ephesians, to the Philippians, two to the Thessalonians, to the Colossians, two to Timothy, to Titus, to Philemon, to the Hebrews; two Epistles of Peter, three of John, one of Jude, and one of James; a book of the Acts of the Apostles, and a book of the Apocalypse of John.

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