

Christianity Clarified Volume 15

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 June 2019

Preacher: Marvin Wiseman

[0 : 00] What is Christianity really all about? The issue remains very confusing to a large segment of our society.

At times it even extends to many who consider themselves Christian. Here, in an ongoing effort to try and dispel some of the confusion, is Marv Wiseman with another session of Christianity Clarified.

The Dispensation of Grace A remarkable term called a dispensation of the grace of God is employed by the Apostle Paul in writing to the Ephesians.

Keep in mind, these Ephesians are further described as Gentiles. That is, they were not Jewish people, but actually were former pagans who worshipped multiple gods. The Apostle Paul, formerly Saul of Tarsus, was specifically raised up by God for the express purpose of being the Apostle to the Gentiles.

Israel already had the original twelve Apostles, handpicked by Jesus early on in his ministry, but the Gentiles had none. That is, until Paul was commissioned an Apostle by the risen, glorified Christ he met on the Damascus Road.

[1 : 16] He relates how it was that God called him and gave him a special commission that involved an administration or stewardship, a new kind of order he was to administer to the Gentiles.

It was the dispensation or the new economy he was to head up and proclaim to these Gentiles. It was called the dispensing or the doling out of the grace of God to them.

This gospel of grace Paul preached was from the God of Israel, but it contained nothing about the rules and regulations as were imposed upon the Jews by the Mosaic Law.

Paul's dispensing of the grace of God constituted an entirely different economy than what had previously been required of the Jew. For the Jew, it was the law, but for the Gentiles, it was grace.

Jews adhered to a strict kosher diet of food. Gentiles did not. Jews were obligated to keep the Sabbath. Gentiles were not.

[2 : 25] Jews were required to circumcise on the eighth day. Gentiles were not. Jews were required to keep feast days of Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles, and other holy days.

Gentiles were not. Are not these distinctions dramatic differences? Well, what was required of Gentiles? Just simple faith.

What do you mean, simple faith? Faith is merely the belief or trust one places in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ for your sin.

This is called being justified by faith and faith alone, or by believing and believing alone. There were no religious hoops to jump through, no promises to make or vows to take, no ritual to undergo.

Just believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved. What made this new economy possible was the substitutionary death of Christ and the grace of God upon which it was founded?

[3 : 30] This is why Paul preached to the Ephesian Gentiles, For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith, and that it is not of yourselves, but is the gift of God, not of works, so no one can boast.

This message and this new economy is what Paul was commissioned to declare. It was the dispensing or the giving out of the grace of God. The grace of God brings salvation.

In his letter to Titus, chapter 2, Paul speaks of the grace of God as bringing salvation. It was this very grace that prompted the Father to send the Son, to be that bringer of salvation.

God's grace was the motivating factor and those to whom this salvation came was the entire human race. The positive value and extent of the benefits of Christ's death were as great as the negative extent of Adam's sin.

The constructive, redemptive work of Christ was as great as the destructive, rebellious work of Adam. This work of Christ appeared to or for all men in the same way the sin of Adam appeared to or for all men.

[4 : 57] The net effect was that even though all men are not saved, all men are made savable. Thus, there was no one left outside the possibility of salvation due to the extent or the scope of the vicarious death of Christ.

He did indeed die for the sins of the entire world. This truth also ties in with another found in John 1 that says, For the law came by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.

God's grace, of course, existed long before the incarnation of Christ, as is evidenced by its application upon Adam, Noah, Abraham, and several others.

Yet, when Christ came, he brought with him a manifestation of grace that was hitherto unknown. In fact, Christ was the very personification of grace itself, and along with grace, he also personified truth, himself designated as such in John 14.

Grace, we can only say, is that gracious, benevolent attribute found in the character and nature of the Almighty. Our God is a gracious and giving God.

[6 : 18] And this same grace that motivated God the Father also resided in God the Son. And when he came, he came to bring that grace and truth, and all humanity benefited from it.

It is this grace, says Paul, that brings salvation, rescue, deliverance. Mankind was hopelessly entrenched in sin, with no way out, other than paying the wages of sin, which is death.

It was this death deserved by all humanity for which Christ came to rescue or deliver us. Thus, the death of Christ was substitutionary, a central fact that makes Christianity what it is and distinguishes it from all other belief systems.

The gospel preached after the death of Christ promised to apply the merits of that substitutionary death to all who responded to the gospel by placing their faith in Jesus Christ.

Thus, we can easily see why Paul, in his writing to Titus, exclaimed, the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all and for all men.

[7 : 38] The grace of God teaches us. The Titus 2 passage reveals that while the grace of God brings salvation, it also does much more.

Once our salvation by grace is accomplished by responding in faith to the gospel, much more remains to be done. Grace isn't finished with us simply because our salvation has been secured.

In many ways, the grace of God received in our salvation is just the beginning. What lies ahead after regeneration is education.

Until one is in Christ, he is not even in position to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ. All he can do is wallow in his intellectual capability.

He may have the highest achievement in academic degrees, but he is no candidate for a spiritual education until he comes to faith in Christ. It has been said that salvation by grace is the end of the gospel, but it's the front end.

[8 : 44] Now, the learning begins in earnest. Just what is it that a new recipient of God's grace is to be taught? The apostle tells us the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.

Grace, properly understood, does this. It clearly corrects the notion some have who believe grace is a license to sin or loose living.

Far from it. Incoming, saving grace not only regenerates, but seeks to provide a whole new value system, new norms and standards in the heart of the one who has been saved by this grace.

How well and how rapidly one progresses in his newfound faith is largely determined by the quality of student we are. In realizing the incredibly huge price Christ paid to secure our salvation in order to present it to us as a gift, it surely ought to awaken a sincere desire to get with his program, whatever that entails.

Phillips translates it as, we should live responsible, honorable, and God-fearing lives. Is this too much to ask, especially in light of two really important facts?

[10 : 14] Fact one, in view of what Christ endured to secure your eternal salvation, is it too much to ask? In fact, two, even the power for you to live this kind of life is provided for you by grace once you exercise your volition in applying to God for that power.

Can a redeemed, forgiven sinner be so ungrateful for his salvation, for peace, for joy, for blessings, untold, not to deliver himself to God in surrender and request from him his enablement to live out these spiritual qualities.

In doing so, God is glorified, grace realizes its end in your spiritual education, and you yourself are benefited beyond measure. All of this, the grace of God wants to prepare you to learn and receive.

Are you ready? Growing in Grace Ephesians 2.8 makes it clear that grace is that by which we are saved, and 2 Peter 3 makes it equally clear that grace is that in which we are to grow.

They make a dynamic spiritual duo. Once we come into spiritual life by grace through faith, this faith and this grace are very much living realities, not stagnant or static.

[11 : 43] They are rather spiritual dynamics in which we are to grow and mature. After all, it's the very nature of something that is alive to grow. Peter tells the believers to whom he writes that they are to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Growth in grace results in an increased demeanor of graciousness. It will profoundly impact the way we treat others with deference, with forbearance, with patience, with forgiveness.

Well, you get the point. And Peter says we are to grow in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. Isn't it apparent that these truly go together?

How could anyone grow in the knowledge of Christ and not grow in graciousness? What can we say about the professed Christian who can only manage an attitude of grumpiness rather than graciousness?

He needs to log more time in making a serious case study of the Lord Jesus. After all, we are called to be conformed to Christ's image. The more time we spend focusing on Him and contemplating Him, the more likely we are to grow in Him, develop His caring compassion and profound love for others.

- [13 : 01] To grow in Christ means to reflect His character and qualities more and more. And to grow in grace means we will come to appreciate more and more that our blessedness and empowerment are all dependent upon grace, not upon our gifts, our abilities, our intellect, our cleverness, or our resourcefulness.

It is as Paul said, I am what I am by the grace of God. People growing in grace will be people who are glowing with grace, just can't help it.

The growth in the knowledge of Christ feeds our growth in the graces of Christ. Growing in both also feeds our own appreciation and gratitude for all we enjoy by being in Christ.

This whole affair of growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ is to be standard operating procedure for all believers. Not only so, but the more this is experienced in the life of one Christian, the more it profoundly affects and encourages other Christians to go and do likewise.

It is a contagious thing. And no doubt is meant to be. Can we not also conclude that our growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ should automatically make us more attractive to those who do not know Him?

- [14 : 21] To grow in our Lord's grace and knowledge also affords the maximum satisfaction and enjoyment of being in Him. We ourselves are beneficiaries of this growth as well.

The benefits are spread all around by advancing in this glorious growth. All believers possess the potential for this spiritual growth. It is up to us whether it will be realized.

Hearts established with grace. One of the pressing needs for every believer in Jesus Christ is stability, spiritual poise, and peace within.

Not only is it a need, but it is a provision God makes available to all who are in Christ. But its being available does not mean it is automatic.

Tragically, there are many believers filled with neuroses, anxieties, and mental trepidation of all kinds. Such is not becoming to a believer nor need it be a reality in the Christian's life.

- [15 : 29] Such people, though genuine Christians, make themselves available to every wind of doctrine, every new fad, every scheme proposed by crafty people, take advantage of their frantic search for happiness.

They are always up and down, reeling to and fro with nothing nailed down. They are those of whom the writer of Hebrews spoke when he said, Be not carried about with many strange doctrines, for it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace, not with matters of food.

Food? What does food have to do with this? These people were distracted from the spiritual which had to do with grace and were focused on the physical which was concerned with food.

This was the regulation imposed on food, the kind of food, and the ceremonial rules about certain foods. These things, special diets and all, will do nothing for your inner person.

Don't get hung up on these things. What is needful is for your heart, the inner core of your being, to be strengthened by grace. Others translate it by saying, your heart being made stable by grace.

- [16 : 48] Another, for the heart to be strengthened by God's spiritual strength. And yet another, that our souls should gain their strength from the grace of God.

Get all the understanding you can to be educated with and by the grace of God, and it will provide the stability and staying power you need for all of life.

The contrast of negative results by those who get all worked up about their ritualistic diet of food follows by saying, not with meats, matters of food, special kinds of food, rules and regulations about food, and he then throws these all under the which have not profited them that have been occupied therein.

Do you see the contrast between grace which results in great profitability and the focus on diets that results in no profit, no stability of soul, no anchor for one's life, and no peace within?

Someone has said, the main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing. And for the believer, the main thing is the grace of God that gave us Christ our Lord and all that comes with him.

[18 : 05] This is the grace of God. Law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. We are to live in grace, rejoice in grace, give with grace, receive with grace, speak with grace, sing with grace, labor with grace, be established by grace, and die with grace.

Stewards of the manifold grace of God In 1 Peter 4, the apostle speaks of the importance for those who have received spiritual gifts to be diligent in ministering to others in the use of those gifts.

Peter calls this being a good steward of the manifold grace of God. A steward was one who was appointed to oversee the affairs of his master. God was the master, the apostles were the stewards, and that of which they were stewards was the manifold grace of God.

This grace, in the context, appears to be the spiritual gifts God gave to men. What they were to do with those gifts was to use them in their ministry to others.

The manifold grace means that God's gracious gifts involved an assortment, a varied or many-sided provision. The apostles were overseers or managers of that which the now absent Christ had earlier committed to them to be held in their custody and protection.

[19 : 36] Some translators used the word trustees instead of stewards, it being a more up-to-date term. In context, Peter reminds his recipients by saying, they are to extend love to one another and display a hospitable spirit one towards another.

Peter's colleague, the apostle Paul, expresses the same urgency in Romans 12 when writing, having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, prophesy according to the proportion of faith, or serving, serve well, or he that teaches on his teaching.

Whether exhortation or giving or ruling, all is to be done with seriousness of purpose and due diligence. All this and more comes under the heading of being good administrators of the multifaceted grace of God.

There is also the undeniable connection between being stewards of the grace of God and not receiving the grace of God in vain, which means we are not to be recipients of God's grace and then not allow it to fulfill its intended purpose in our life, namely, that of being conformed to the image of Christ.

We are to grow in grace as a recipient of his grace. Is our lifestyle conducive to that? If not, our lack of growth constitutes an abuse of grace.

[21 : 08] It is receiving grace in vain or to no good purpose, and as well, not being a good steward of the grace of God given to us.

One can easily see all of the intertwining connections between these facets of God's grace. The grace of God extended to every believer starts with our regeneration and salvation.

To every recipient is this grace given, and it is for the express purpose of being utilized by each child of God in accord with gifts and opportunities given.

Being a good or responsible steward of the many-faceted grace of God is both an incredible privilege as well as a solemn responsibility not to be taken lightly. It is a serious business to be so endowed.

Let us maximize every opportunity as good stewards. Grace sufficient in trials The operation of the grace of God bestowed upon the believer at the beginning of his life in Christ is just that.

[22 : 17] Only the beginning. There is so much more grace, an exhaustible grace to be sure, that is now at the new Christian's disposal. Paul reminds us in Romans 8 that, He who spared not his own son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not also with him freely give us all things?

Paul's statement and argument for God's ongoing gracious provision is from the greater provision to the lesser. The greater was in God's giving of his son.

Having done that, how could God not also do the lesser? Whatever the need may be for drawing upon the grace of God, it surely is not as great as our greater need, that of the giving of his son.

God's giving of his son makes everything else he gives to be incidental in comparison. The apostle personally attests to this by way of personal experience.

He tells us he was called to be the apostle to the Gentiles by the grace of God. And then, when well into his ministry, Paul was dealing with a thorn in the flesh.

[23 : 28] And this was not fully described in 2 Corinthians 12, so we still do not know exactly what it was. But it is apparent that some kind of physical impediment or hindrance was involved.

At least, to some degree, it seems that Paul was incapacitated. The logical thing to do for an apostle would be to prayerfully request that God remove that obstacle.

And one would think that if anyone had an inside track regarding prayer and receiving answers to your prayers, it would be the apostle Paul. He repeatedly asked God to remove whatever that undefined thorn was, not once nor twice, but three times he asked.

And in his infinite wisdom, which only God possesses, he told Paul he was not going to remove it, but he would provide sufficient grace for Paul to be able to bear it.

That would not be the answer of choice for any of us. Yet, it was the answer God deemed best for Paul and his ministry. And it is safe to say that Paul's labor under these negative circumstances contributed greatly to making the apostle what he became for the rest of his ministry.

[24 : 41] This needs to be a powerful lesson to us all. Sometimes when we think we know what we need and we ask God to meet that need, it isn't what we truly need at all.

God knows what our real need is, and he answers in accordance with his perspective, not ours. And we should be grateful that he does. While God does not need our permission to do for us what he knows to be best, but if he did, would we give it?

It took the great apostle three times at getting his thorn in the flesh removed until he finally got the picture. Not removal of the thorn, but God's all-sufficient grace to bear it was the answer.

We should revel in God's overriding of our prayers so he can provide his all-sufficient grace, whatever that may be. Be strong in God's grace.

Words written by a man known to be near death carry more weight than usual. Knowing the end is near tends to focus the mind, someone has said.

[25 : 59] Consider that, please, when you hear of the eleventh hour advice the apostle Paul imparts to Timothy, his young protege. In what was to be the last letter written by the apostle, just before his execution by a Roman sword, here is what he told Timothy.

Thou, therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. No doubt this involved the need for Timothy to rely continually upon the grace that is always available to those Christ has redeemed.

Paul is reminding Timothy, never forget the source of your strength. Appeal to it continually. Additionally, he also may be reminding Timothy of the tendency on the part of unbelievers to repudiate and reject the grace of God.

Can a preacher of grace back off somewhat? Water down grace so as to make it more palatable to non-Christians? A true preacher of grace cannot do that.

Perhaps one who used to be a preacher of grace could do that. But don't let that be you, Timothy. Never back down from the message of the pure, unadulterated grace of God.

[27 : 19] Stay strong in it and for it. Paul himself had to do this in a repeated fashion. The Judaizers would have cut Paul some slack if only he would have required some human effort be mixed with his message of pure grace.

There is no way he could do so, even if it cost him ever so dearly, which eventually it did. Now he is telling Timothy to go and do likewise.

It's worth it, Timothy. Hang tough with this tender but strong message of the grace of God. It's the only thing that will get the job done.

Just remember what it cost our Lord to provide us with this message of grace. Stay strong in this grace and there will be no regrets when the great day for accountability arrives.

Paul's advice to Timothy is applicable to all grace preachers and teachers of today as well. Because nothing is held in such high esteem among unbelievers as their good deeds, their works, and their good intentions.

[28 : 27] It's hard to go against that and tell them that they are all for naught. Yet, that's precisely what the message of the grace of God does. You cannot extol the grace of God and its necessity for faith alone without riling up people who insist their works are so valuable, and accepted by God.

When you go against that, Timothy, expect to take some heat and experience a fair amount of rejection. Pure grace doctrine insists on slaying a lot of sacred cows held dear by unbelievers.

Do it, Timothy, and once they come to see it, perhaps only through repeated exposure they will be so grateful. Weren't you? Be strong in the grace of God.

Good hope through grace. We all need our confidence buoyed up from time to time.

Living in a fallen world that we do and being part of it as an equally fallen person that we are, sometimes things can get very discouraging and unsettling.

[29 : 39] But has it ever been any different? No. Not since Genesis 3 and that monumental fall brought about by disobedience to the Creator.

And it's been in the genetic DNA of humanity ever since. It will continue this way and even intensify in evil and all the uncertainties it will bring as we near the big wrap-up.

So, what do we do in the meantime? Just how do we cope and stand up against all this? We take the sound advice the Apostle Paul gave to his Thessalonian converts.

In the second letter he wrote them, he gave them a spiritual boost near the end of chapter two, and here's what he said. Now the Lord Jesus Christ himself and God, even our Father, who has loved us and has given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work.

Did you get that? He has given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace. We've explained the meaning of a biblical hope being far different from our use of the word hope, and as we use it, there is always a question involved, a maybe.

[30 : 57] We hope such and such will occur, but we don't know if it will or not. We hope so. But the Bible never uses it like that. It conveys precisely an opposite in that it comes with assurance and complete confidence, no maybe about it.

The Bible's good hope means the sure thing. Doubt is removed. You can't talk in these terms when humans are behind the thing in which you hope, but you can when it's God who's behind it.

In fact, you should, because he is a God who cannot lie and cannot fail to make good on all he has promised. This is, of course, including the benevolence and the power that lies behind all that God has done and will do.

Not maybe, but certainly. And what is the basis for God doing all this? He says it is good hope or a solid confidence through grace.

That is, the basis for God providing us with this amazing confidence that is so encouraging and so uplifting, regardless of what's happening around you?

[32 : 09] It's all rooted in good hope through grace. Grace! Grace! Marvelous grace of our loving Lord! Grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt!

In considering the theme of grace, one needn't look very far to conclude, irresistibly so, that God's magnanimous grace is behind it all.

It does become rather apparent, doesn't it? There simply is no comparable thing this old fallen world can even come close to providing, like good confidence, absolute confidence, certain confidence for living and dying, like this good hope through grace.

Speech salted with grace. One of the major attractions that drew people to Jesus Christ in his earthly ministry was his manner of speaking, not only in the content of what he said, but in how he said it.

We might say they were captivated by the way he put it when he spoke of great truths. To be sure, Christ did have scathing rebukes directed toward the current batch of hypocrites, but he also spoke in tenderest terms to those in admission of their needs and shortcomings.

[33 : 33] Christ has infinite patience for the truly repentant, but he does disdain phoniness, sham, and pretense, all the long suits of the religious establishment.

The importance of right speech delivered with a right tone is underlined by the Apostle Paul in Colossians 4. He says, Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how to answer every man.

Speech that is seasoned with salt does not mean using salty language as the world employs it today. Our use of language with salt is a far cry from the way Paul employed it in the first century.

His use involved language that was kindly and winsome. Language without salt is like food without salt, insipid and lacking in flavor.

Our speaking to others should be such that it will be of value to them. We should speak in such a way that they will regard it worthwhile to listen to what we have to say.

[34 : 42] And salt does produce thirst, doesn't it? Consider it a priority that we speak to people in such a way that they will welcome hearing more from us.

Does our speaking and communicating with people make them thirsty to hear more? And don't make the mistake of thinking everything we say has to be of spiritual content.

While it's true that is the most important issue there is, there are other topics we can intelligently discuss without always having an agenda to share spiritual content.

The best way to speak with people is simply be a good conversationalist and be yourself. And it's amazing how often good opportunities to share the gospel can arise without our planning them.

We need to be natural, relaxed, and enter into areas that interest other people in our conversations. Christians with good intentions should avoid being preachy or repeatedly quoting scripture.

[35 : 43] This is not speaking with words that contain salt. Speech seasoned with salt does not turn people off, but draws people nearer. Speech seasoned with the salt of grace is gentle, kind, genuinely interested in the other person.

Nothing so readily opens minds and hearts like hearing from someone who speaks with a gracious attitude using language of grace seasoned with salt. People were amazed at our Lord and the gracious words that proceeded out of his mouth.

We should go and do likewise. Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how to answer every man. Colossians 4.

Grace is given to the humble. Any believer seeking for God's grace to be maximized in his life needs to understand the divine directive for being that recipient.

Principal requirement is set forth in James 4, and it says, God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. The simple truth of that is saying, God doesn't make much of anything available to the proud, but he has grace aplenty to impart to the humble.

[37 : 06] Why do you suppose it works that way? It's no doubt related to the idea of the proud thinking themselves to be very self-sufficient. They are characterized by a certain smugness that God finds very displeasing.

And so do most people. In actuality, all human pride is born out of ignorance, because if one is truly knowledgeable, he of all people knows he has no real basis for pride.

Humility is the only attitude one can possibly have if he has any understanding of his true estate. Those who do can't be proud because they know there is no real basis for it.

The proud, laboring under the illusion of self-sufficiency, is self-deceived regarding his own abilities and worthiness. He is not facing a true reality.

And among other things, God is. He is a God of reality. A person who is proud is one who is not in tune with reality, because if he were, he would be humble and not proud.

[38 : 14] So when God resists or ignores the proud, but gives grace to the humble, there is an essential compatibility between a humble person and a God that delights in dispensing his grace.

All God needs for doing so is to find a person who is aware of their true estate, admits it by living a life before God and man that reflects a genuine humility. And such a person is then in position to receive the enabling grace God wants to give.

There may be no more sterling example of an extremely proud man who became an extremely humble man than Saul of Tarsus, later to be Paul the Apostle. Once he learned the real truth of his condition, his pride began to melt away, to be replaced with a genuine humility.

That Damascus road experience and all it entailed convinced Saul of Tarsus who and what he really was in contrast to who and what he thought he was. And when he grasped that, pride had to go.

There was simply no basis for it. This, of course, positioned him for the ongoing infusion of God's grace which he was able to draw upon throughout his entire life that remained.

[39 : 34] Perhaps more than anything else, pride is the sin that opens the way for every other kind of ungodly thinking and activity. Little wonder the proverb speaks of pride going before the fall.

Pride is nothing but a confidence in self and one's own ability to do and be as we ought apart from divine assistance. It's another way of saying I really don't need God nor his assistance.

The proud are akin to the fool who says in his heart, there is no God. Abusing the grace of God is a subject akin to that of receiving the grace of God in vain.

They are really one and the same in their effect. To receive the grace of God in vain is to not allow it to do its intended work in you and through you.

In you, God's grace wants to conform you to the image of Christ. Through you, God's grace wants you to extend yourself and the grace he has given you to others.

[40 : 47] Refusal to do either means one has received the grace of God to no good end, and that is tantamount to abusing the grace of God as well. To abuse is to mistreat, to offend, to depreciate, to deny proper treatment.

One would think that a recipient of the grace of God that comes to us at the expense of God's own Son, such an one would hasten to make himself available to God and his grace, and he would be at the ready to follow orders, whatever they may be.

One would think. But it often is not so. All too soon, too many believers forget the pit from which we came before knowing Christ.

Often we are not at the ready to do his bidding. Even though we are new creatures in Christ, we still possess an old Adamic nature described in Romans 6 and 7, and he, our old Adamic nature, wants us to do his bidding.

Thank you. After all, our old nature will tell you, I was here first. And when we give in to that old nature, we automatically abuse the grace of God.

[42 : 03] Grace was not given us that we might abuse it. But that it might empower us to godly living. The yielding passages of Romans 6 reminds us that when we yield our members, eyes, ears, hands, feet, etc., to the flesh, we deny the spirit of grace and his right to reign in our mortal bodies.

How can a Christian do that? Very easily, thank you. We, even though believers, still have a very much intact volition, a decider that we command.

And when we yield as an act of our will, our members to the flesh rather than to the spirit, we are walking in the flesh rather than walking in the spirit. Consequently, we produce the works or fruits of whichever one gains our cooperation.

If it's the flesh, it's an automatic abuse of the grace of God. The believer must realize that even though he is a new creation in Christ, he remains in charge of his volition, and he is responsible under grace as to how he uses it.

Because we have an option and can submit to the flesh, the grace of God is set for the possibility of abuse. All Christians should be aware that abusing the grace of God by yielding ourselves to the flesh constitutes not only an abuse of God's grace, but smacks of downright spiritual treason.

[43 : 30] We are acting as traitors to the God of all grace who regenerated us with new life. So while we may abuse the grace of God, we should be willing to go to any length rather than to do so.

Receiving the grace of God in vain is related to abusing the grace of God, and they are curious expressions and warnings given by the Apostle Paul.

This in 2 Corinthians chapter 6. Whatever could he have meant by that? We then, as workers together with him, Christ, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain.

What does this receiving the grace of God in vain consist of? The term in vain means to no good or purposeful end. Receive it so as to do nothing with it, to waste or squander it.

It has reference to having received some talent or ability, but then failing to utilize or put it to its intended purpose. All who have received the grace of God, the salvation and forgiveness that comes with it, are not to be mere depositories of that grace.

[44 : 53] God did not give us his grace for our hoarding or storing, but for our dispensing and proclaiming. In other words, God never gave us his grace for the purpose of its stopping with us, but for its flowing through us to others.

We believers are all to be conduits, vessels through which God's grace flows to others. Every act of kindness we perform is a utilization of God's grace through us to others.

We need to let grace flow profusely. Sharing the good news of the gospel of the grace of God with others is putting the grace he gave us to good and proper use.

God's grace is not merely the dynamic of salvation received, but God's grace in us provides a resource or fountain through which we let that grace flow to others.

And to the extent we do not make use of God's grace given to us is the extent to which we have received it in vain. We are not allowing the grace of God to do what God intended it to do when he bestowed it upon us.

[46 : 00] This is receiving the grace of God in vain. And for Paul to have issued a plea to the Corinthians not to do this, not to receive the grace of God in vain, surely must have meant they had the potential and capability of doing that very thing.

Otherwise, his beseeching them not to do it makes no sense at all. If the Corinthians were in danger of receiving the grace of God in vain, how can this not be a very real possibility for us as 21st century believers?

It would appear that any believer living at any time in history could very well be capable of this, of having received the grace of God in vain.

And all too often, Christians have the idea that God's grace is our own personal possession to comfort us, to empower us, to prepare us, but us.

For what? To merely absorb God's grace as though we ourselves are the final end and destiny of God's grace? No. Not at all.

[47 : 07] Let us, Paul is at least implying, let us be the starting place of God's grace when it comes to us, that it may continue on through us to others.

And if we are, we surely will avoid receiving the grace of God in vain. Frustrating the grace of God It is a powerful corrective and conclusion with which Paul ends the second chapter to the Galatians.

Throughout this epistle, he is extolling the centrality of the grace of God, particularly as it applies to human salvation. Those with whom the apostle had to contend, in an ongoing way, were the Judaizers or the legalists.

These were thoroughly dug in as regards the law of Moses. They were persuaded that only through the strict observances of the law could anyone attain to a righteousness that God would accept.

Paul's argument is, if that is true, then where does that place the grace of God? If that is true, where does that place the very death of Christ?

[48 : 17] Here is precisely how Paul put it in Galatians 2. Said he, Paul would have none of this.

Do you not see, he is saying, if anyone can achieve a right standing before God based on observing and keeping the law, then what purpose did the death of Christ actually accomplish?

The only conclusion that can be reached is Christ died unnecessarily. This frustrates the grace of God. To frustrate involves the thwarting of a plan.

The plan of God was for Christ to die for the sins of the world. That plan would effectively be neutralized if righteousness comes by law-keeping.

Christ would then have died in vain or to no good end. This argument and its unavoidable conclusion is critical and urgent.

[49 : 22] Christ's death was absolutely essential if there was to be any salvation for a lost world. And it was precisely because man could not be saved or justified by the law that Christ's coming and dying was a necessity.

Don't you see, argues Paul, supposed salvation through the keeping of the law or any other means completely frustrates, annuls, disesteems, devalues, cancels, negates the very death of Christ on our behalf.

Such people as the legalists, the Judaizers, are in effect saying, Christ really needn't have come. He needn't have died because all we need to do is keep the law God gave through Moses.

Paul's corrective to that is also reflected in Galatians 3 when he reveals the real purpose of the law. It was not the law's purpose to justify or to make anyone righteous.

The meaning of the law, said he, was to serve as our schoolmaster, teacher, or coach to bring us unto Christ that we might be justified by faith in him and not by the works of the law.

[50 : 33] By the law is the knowledge of sin. Knowledge that is designed to lead us to Christ for his salvation. Anything set forth for salvation, apart from the death of Christ and his resurrection, frustrates the grace of God.

Believers must avoid that at all costs. Insulting the Spirit of Grace In the tenth chapter of Hebrews, the writer sets up an important contrast between two parties, both of whom are under divine judgment for their rejection of God's authority.

The first is one who disrespects and rejects the law of Moses given by God. He is to be put to death upon the testimony of two or three witnesses and show no mercy.

There's no question that is severe punishment. But the writer reveals a punishment greater yet than that. Listen to these solemn words. How much severe punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified and has insulted the Spirit of Grace?

Serious business is described here, and not to be trifled with. Can a mere human actually have the audacity to insult the Spirit of Grace?

[52 : 06] Apparently so. There appears to be no limit to the amount of brazen defiance that man can level against the Almighty. Here it is called doing despot, or insulting the Spirit of Grace.

It is this same Holy Spirit, a member of the triune God, who provides the regenerating power in the human heart upon one's belief in Jesus Christ.

Is there any agency whom we should welcome more? Is there any other source who is able to cleanse and forgive us in our interior, reaching into the core of our being and bringing about this supernatural act of making us a new person in Christ?

This is the very life-giving Spirit. It is He who makes application of the merits of Christ to our very person. The Father devised salvation's plan, the Son carried out the plan, and the Holy Spirit applies the benefits of that plan to each and every believing sinner.

What an incredible act of grace have we here, from the devising of the plan to its application. The application is the final act in our regeneration, the application of the result of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ put to our account.

[53 : 27] This is done by the Holy Spirit of grace, and none of us knows how He did it. We only know He makes us a new creation in Christ. We have no words to describe the wonder of this regenerative miracle, nor can we render adequate thanks for it.

Can we then imagine anyone so ungrateful, so disrespectful, and blasphemous as to insult the entire operation? Such an one is said to be guilty of trampling underfoot the Son of God and the blood He shed to effect the new covenant, while insulting the Spirit of grace, who stands ready to bless even the most undeserving with the merits of Christ.

We cannot imagine a more brazen, crass, and insulting behavior on the part of a human being. Yet, the writer of Hebrews asserts they are out there.

Their punishment will be visited upon all their insults and blasphemies. Yet, even for those who insult in this manner, grace stands at the ready to forgive and cleanse even such as these.

Turning Grace into Immorality The grace of God has always been available, as long as there have been sinful fallen men in need of it.

[54 : 47] And its first human application appeared to be that of which Adam and Eve partook, when God slew innocent animals to obtain the coverings for our first parents. In no way can we say they were deserving of such a provision.

It was a grace gift, yet one that was welded to justice. And justice was served, and that death was meted out in the taking of an innocent life for the crime of the guilty.

All of this, of course, prefigured that ultimate innocent life to be given for the guilty 4,000 years after Adam and Eve. And hundreds of years after Adam, Noah was a recipient of this same provision when he was said to have found grace in the eyes of the Lord.

Noah, his wife, sons, and their wives, eight souls in all, But what about all the rest of the world? Was there no grace available to them? Indeed, there was.

But these, consisting of whatever the balance of the world population was at the time, did not choose to avail themselves of God's grace. It's always available to those who repent.

[55 : 54] But ah, there's the rub. Repentance means a change of mind, change of mind about one's sin and willingness to forsake it. And here today, the world at large is precisely at the same place as Noah's world.

Jude's little book, just before Revelation, last book in the Bible, tells us about these people, and they still constitute the majority of the world's makeup, just as they did before the flood of Noah.

They are described as ungodly men who turn the grace of God into immorality. What kind of immorality? Well, how many kinds are there?

They manage to find them all. Philip's translation states it thusly, The ungodly abuse his grace as an opportunity for immorality, and Weymouth translates it as ungodly men who pervert the grace of God into immorality.

These are among us today. Rather than repenting of sin and appealing to God for his ever-available grace and mercy, they thumb their noses at his offer and pursue ever-new and perverted ways to show their contempt for the Creator.

[57 : 08] Jude describes those of his day as reminiscent of Sodom and Gomorrah, and we, two thousand years later, are rampant with the like perversion.

Jude sees them as walking or operating after their own lusts with mouths speaking great swelling words. And then he warns that in the last days, which may well be our own days, there will be mockers who will come after their own ungodly lusts, they will be sensual and not possess the Spirit.

It's a perfect description of profligacy, hedonism, and a total disregard for decency and for those who would call them to it. They of old, and these of today, spurn, reject, and ridicule the grace of God, substituting what they could enjoy from him for their own preferred immoralities, a tragic abuse and scorning of that which was provided for them at an incalculable cost.

Pauling from Grace The letter the Apostle Paul was inspired to write to the Galatians is much like a legal document along the lines of his letter to the Romans.

Both set forth the principles of justification by faith and the righteousness that comes from believing on Christ as opposed to the efforts involved in keeping the law of Moses.

[58 : 39] Paul, himself a Jew and fully familiar with the law and all it entailed, could speak to it with great authority. He himself was formerly one of those legalistic law keepers just like those with whom he is now contending.

Paul knew their thinking because all his life previous to his Damascus road encounter with the living Christ, he was a Pharisee and devoted entirely to the law of Moses and all its demands.

Now, he knows that since Christ came and died, the law was fulfilled in him. Thus, the law served its purpose by revealing man's failures and pointing him to Christ in order to be justified by faith.

But it was so very hard to convince the Jew of this. These who had eaten, breathed, and slept with the law of Moses are hard-pressed to relinquish it.

Even those Jews who had come to faith in Christ still held a prominent place in their minds for the law. It is understandable, human nature being as it is, for these to still cling to the demands of the law, at least in some respects.

[59 : 52] After all, few Gentiles have any idea how deeply ingrained the law is in the mind and heart of the pious Jew. And even after coming to faith in Jesus as Messiah and Savior, there could still be the tendency to revert to law-keeping, pick up the old memories of the law, and return to incorporating it into every fiber of their life.

This is because unlearning is a lot harder than learning. To those Jews who did this, or believe they should do this, Paul says, you have just walked away from Christ and His grace.

You are fallen from grace. You have abandoned the grace principle. Now, sadly, many have used this passage to teach that one may have been a recipient of God's grace, but no longer is.

He has fallen from grace or fallen from the favor of God. But the context of this entire epistle should reveal this is not so. What Paul is saying is, all of you who believe you can be justified by your keeping of the law, you have abandoned the very principle of grace.

You have deserted. Cut yourself off from grace. The reason Paul takes this position is because the grace of God will not share the limelight with anything.

[61 : 18] Grace allows the law to lead people to it, but grace will not allow the law to be a part of the cleansing accomplished only by grace.

Grace cannot be co-mingled with any additive or it ceases to be grace. Grace is not 99% pure. It is 100%.

Anything less completely departs from the grace of God. Grace for dying.

We have heard and read accounts from both Old and New Testaments about people of God being put to death, executed because of their being people of God. And we have often wondered, how did they do it?

How did they withstand the pain, the agony? Hebrews 11 is called the Hall of Faith, and it recounts the history of some who were stoned, cut in two, slain with a sword, and worse.

- [62 : 21] How could they bear up under that? The premier example, of course, was the unspeakable horror of crucifixion. The answer? Dying grace.

A supernatural grace provided by the Almighty. Despite the physical, emotional, and spiritual agony experienced by Jesus on the cross, he still uttered those gracious words, Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.

How could he do that? Dying grace. Stephen, bruised and bleeding with broken bones, died under a barrage of stones when he cried out, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.

Both of these, Jesus and Stephen after him, exhibited a greater concern for those who were executing them than for themselves. How did they do that?

Dying grace. We offer no other conclusion. It's very likely that most believers have wondered how they would conduct themselves if facing a genuine martyrdom.

- [63 : 26] Most of us will probably never be put in that position, but if we were, we can't help but wonder, what would surface, the heroic or the non-heroic? There is good and ample evidence of many who have been martyred for Christ through the ages, finding a supernatural reserve and fortitude in their hour of supreme trial.

It can only be attributed to dying grace. This is that supernatural ability or quality to face certain death and do so with an abandonment of concern for self.

William Tyndale, translator of the Bible, was tried for treason and sentenced to death by burning at the stake in 1536. His crime of treason consisted of smuggling Bibles into England hidden in barrels of flour.

As the flames leapt up around his body while tied to a post, Tyndale was heard by the audience to cry out, O God, open the eyes of the King of England!

God did so sixty years later, when then King James commissioned groups of scholars at Oxford and Cambridge to undertake the translation of the Bible from the original languages into English and the King James Version of 1611 was commenced.

- [64 : 46] What else can we call Tyndale's remarkable, even supernatural concern and attitude? Nothing more, nothing less than dying grace.

But make no mistake about it, dying grace is just that. It's only for the dying, not the living. For the living, there is still sufficient grace, but it's living grace, not dying grace.

God, who is the God of all grace, is there for whatever plenteous grace is needed, living or dying. Both are abilities possessed only by God and extended only to those who are also possessed by God.

The Apostle of Grace In all the annals of Christian history spread over the past two thousand years, No one, to our knowledge, has ever challenged the impact made upon the entire world through the Damascus Road experience of Saul of Tarsus, later to become none other than Paul the Apostle.

This unexcelled drama unfolds in Acts chapter 9, and Paul himself recounts his experience to others in Acts 22, 24, 25, and 26.

- [66 : 02] These were on more formal occasions even before political ruling dignitaries. One can only imagine how many times he told his story to others, probably every time he spoke in a synagogue.

No doubt he relived that experience in vivid fashion even to individuals. And to this day, when someone who earlier lived a life of rebellion and abuse of all kinds, and then comes to faith in Christ, resulting in a radical change of life, they are often said to have had a Damascus Road kind of experience.

In actuality, everyone who comes to faith in Christ underwent an enormous change of life. Even though it may not be dramatically noticed outwardly by others, as was Paul's, it is a profound thing that occurred inwardly.

Paul himself in 2 Corinthians 5 tells us, If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation. Old things have passed away, and behold, all things have become new.

There is no natural or human explanation that account for this radical turnaround. No psychiatric couch or psychological therapy could ever produce results like this.

[67 : 19] It is simply supernatural. After all, no one can have a personal encounter with Jesus Christ and ever be the same. Untold millions from the Apostle Paul 2,000 years ago to the present day can attest to the same.

Our conversion may not have been as dramatic outwardly as was Saul's on the Damascus Road, but what took place by regeneration on the inside of us was the same as what took place on the inside of Saul.

The miracle of regeneration, a rebirth on the inside, is standard operating procedure performed by the Holy Spirit upon all and within all who come to faith in Christ at the point of their salvation.

Saul, who became Paul, never hesitated to recount the whole affair along with an appeal to others to place their faith in Christ as he did.

Not because he did, but because it is the right thing to do. He is writing to the Galatians in chapter 1 and remarks that God called me through his grace to the first letter of the Corinthians chapter 15 when he stated, By the grace of God I am what I am.

[68 : 37] And actually, that's true of every one of us who is in Christ. We are all what we are. That is, a child of God in Christ solely by God's grace. Still, perhaps no one knew and felt that more keenly and more consistently than Paul the Apostle.

Out of sure gratitude for that grace, he was willing to spend and be spent for the cause. Two Trophies of the Grace of God All throughout the 2,000-year history of Christendom, the record is replete with accounts of human wreckage, inexplicably transformed by the power of the gospel of the grace of God.

Leading the list is none other than one of the original arch-enemies of Christ, Saul of Tarsus, who later became Paul the Apostle. It appears there are still none who could compare with the miracle of transformation undergone in the life of this Jew, a former Pharisee from the tribe of Benjamin.

But there are those, and not a few, who also tasted of the grace of God in such a startling and dramatic way that the whole world took note of it. Such and one was the profligate, drunken slave ship captain of the 1700s, John Newton.

The epitaph on his tombstone in the churchyard where he pastored reads as follows, John Newton, once an infidel and libertine, a servant of slaves in Africa, was by the rich mercy of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, preserved, restored, pardoned, and appointed to preach the faith he had long labored to destroy.

[70 : 23] On reaching the age of 82, Newton was heard to say, My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things, that I am a great sinner and Christ is a great Savior.

Newton was personal friends with William Cowper, another famous hymn writer, who gave us, There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Emmanuel's veins, and sinners plunged beneath that blood lose all their guilty stains.

And isn't it wonderfully ironic that Newton, who for years captained an infamous slave ship, would become a chief advisor and confidant to none other than William Wilberforce, who won the day in setting slaves free in England, ending the inhumane misery that slavers had profited from for decades?

There, these, Saul of Tarsus, John Newton, are but two examples among countless others that have resulted from men being a partaker of the matchless grace of God.

Lives are dramatically transformed by it, and hymns are written in gratitude to God for that utterly amazing grace. Can anyone recite like instances stemming from any other source?

[71 : 41] There is something contained in the gospel of the grace of God that is able to melt the coldest and hardest of hearts. And we do not begin to understand the divine dynamic, but those who have experienced it know whereof we speak.

To think that God can and will pardon and forgive the worst among us, based only upon our repentance and faith in what another has done for us, is truly incomprehensible.

And in addition, this, another who did this for us, is none other than God's own sinless Son who gave himself freely for us all. This is what the grace of God has done.

This is what it still does, and does so well, since Paul the Apostle was a recipient of that grace, and then devoted his life to telling it abroad. We no longer have an apostle among us, but we still have that infinite grace of God extended to all who believe.

Grace people are gracious people. Who are the people of grace? They are those who are personal recipients of the grace of God made available to them because of their faith in the substitutionary death of Christ on the cross.

[73 : 00] They are people who constitute the spiritual body of Christ, of which Christ is the head. They are of every tribe, tongue, and nation. They are of all skin colors and every ethnic background known to man.

One thing they all have in common is that each is a possessor of the grace of God in salvation. One of the chief ways such a recipient of grace should be known is by his own personal testimony of faith in Christ and by his attitude and actions toward others.

What kind of attitude do you think should be standard operating procedures for one who says he has been saved by grace through believing in the Lord Jesus Christ?

What mode of behavior might well be expected from one who is a direct personal recipient of the grace of God? Well, how about a spirit of grace?

How could someone saved by grace not be a demonstration of graciousness toward others? Grace extended toward others should be an obvious calling card of all who claim to be a recipient of God's grace.

[74 : 12] No one should have to look at or listen to a believer and wonder where his grace is. We ought to be known for it. Grace is demonstrated in that kindness, that benevolence, that desire to be accommodating, helpful, and encouraging to others.

Rather than exude the sweetness and gentleness characteristic of Christ, Christians can suffer a spiritual relapse and forget the grace that was so abundantly lavished upon them.

Christians have an amazing potential for pleasantness of spirit, but if they are walking in the flesh, they can be sour, demanding, and unaccommodating.

Brethren, these things ought not so to be. Our greatest impact as recipients of God's grace is to be gracious to others, and not only to those of the household of faith, but to those without.

Grace is too precious a commodity to not pass around whenever the opportunity arises. We desperately need to be known, not only for the word of our testimony, but by the generous spirit of our graciousness.

[75 : 29] What better way to attract people to Christ than by letting them see firsthand what the grace of God has done for us? Will we be an attractive living advertisement for our Savior and His grace?

Just think of the privilege that is ours, along with the responsibility. Both are awesome. Privilege and responsibility. We who have received the grace of God in salvation need to remind ourselves of who we were before and what He has made us by His grace.

Then, let our light shine through a gracious spirit and disposition to others. You've just heard another session of Christianity Clarified with Marv Wiseman.

Having devoted the past 41 segments on two volumes of Christianity Clarified, that is, volumes 14 and 15, we will, on the next volume of Christianity Clarified, turn our attention to another critical theological term that is nearly as misunderstood as it is critical.

It is the subject of faith. Since my own coming to faith in Christ in 1956, I have been burdened for so many believers who have but little understanding of both grace and faith.

[77 : 14] Yes, they are saved by grace through faith. They fully possess the salvation in Christ that will one day put them in his presence for eternity.

And it is true that all the misunderstandings we have now will then no longer exist. But we are not there now. And being here, it behooves us and honors our Savior to live this Christian life to the fullest.

Perhaps there is no better platform for being able to do that than by having a serious understanding of those two incomparable terms called grace and faith.

There is so very much pertinent to the life of the believer that stems from both of these priceless words and their careful explanations.

This is why we are devoting two volumes to each. Volumes 14 and 15 treated the numerous biblical references and expressions of grace.

[78 : 19] And volumes 16 and 17 will treat the theological meaning of the term faith. Both terms suffer from an unacceptable misunderstanding on the part of too many people who could be rejoicing and reveling in both.

So, to the extent we are able, and with an awareness of our own shortcomings and our own vulnerability to misunderstanding and thus misstating the concept, we are yet compelled to offer our findings.

As with all previous volumes of Christianity Clarified, as well as those that will follow, we are very much aware that we are far from having all the truth and understanding we would like to have.

But nevertheless, such as we do have, we offer unto you. So, if you are interested in pursuing with us an attempt to better understand and appreciate great theological concepts, but in common everyday language, you are most welcome and sincerely encouraged to join us as we continue our efforts to clarify Christianity.

This is Pastor Marv Wiseman, grateful to have you as a fellow learner. Thank you so very much. Thank you.

[80 : 07] Thank you.