



Bible Student's Notebook™

The Herald of His Grace

Presenting every man mature in Christ Jesus. Colossians 1:28

Volume 43
Issue 1075

The Grace Progression: From Mercy to Majesty

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How Love, Sovereignty and Justice Transform Everything

by — Steve Martin

Key Points:

Grace flows from God's unchanging love, not our repentance.....	9021
Grace is not an offer; it's a sovereign plan written before we were born.....	9023
We are not on probation; we are fully accepted in God's eyes.....	9023
Grace keeps expanding and surprising.....	9023

We all begin somewhere with grace.



For many of us, grace starts as mercy – a divine pardon, a reprieve from punishment. But if we keep walking, grace doesn't stay small. It stretches, deepens and transforms. It becomes not just something that God gives, but something that defines everything about Who God is – and everything about who we are in Him.

Here's how grace has unfolded in my own journey – a progression from mercy to majesty.

1. Grace as Mercy for Sinners

In the beginning, grace meant that I wasn't going to get what I deserved. It was mercy. God looked at my sin and chose to forgive me. I was grateful – but still carried guilt. I imagined grace as a rope thrown to a drowning man, but I wasn't sure how long God would keep holding on. Grace felt fragile, like it depended on my behavior. It was beautiful – but limited.

2. Grace as the Expression of Unconditional Love

Over time, I realized that grace wasn't a response to my sin – it was a reflection of God's heart. Grace wasn't fragile. It didn't fluctuate with my performance. It didn't say, "I love you anyway," but "I love you. Always." When I saw that grace flowed from God's unchanging love, the pressure lifted. I didn't have to earn His affection or keep His attention. I already had it.

3. Grace as Liberation from Religion

This realization set me free – not just from guilt, but from religion itself. I began to see how the systems we build often hijack grace, using it to lure people in, then control them with fear. But grace doesn't bind. It frees. It liberates us from performance-based faith, from

(continued on page 9023)

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Bible Student's Notebook™

Paul Our Guide – Christ Our Goal

ISSN: 1936-9360

Volume 43, No. 1075 – June 16, 2025

Scripture education in a weekly format!

This free electronic publication is dedicated to:

- the absolute sovereignty and deity of God (Romans 11:36);
- the proclamation of the riches of God's abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7);
- the affirmation that God will save all through the death, burial and resurrection of Christ (I Timothy 2:3-4; 4:10; Titus 2:11);
- the universality of death and resurrection (I Corinthians 15:21);
- the unique gospel of Paul – which he calls "my gospel" (Romans 2:16; 16:25; II Timothy 2:8; I Corinthians 15:1-4; Acts 13:28; Acts 20:24);
- the "preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret in ages past" (Romans 16:25);
- the epistles of the present Secret Administration being Ephesians & Colossians (Ephesians 3:2, 9; Colossians 1:25);
- true freedom and liberty apart from law (Galatians 5:1);
- the organic nature of the One Body (Ephesians 4:16);
- the Secret Administration, being the operational revelation for today (Ephesians 3:9);
- the unprophesied, Celestial hope and calling of the One Body (Colossians 3:4);
- the distinct message and ministry of Paul, the apostle to the nations (Ephesians 3:1-3);
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15);
- the recovery of rich Biblical truth that has too long remained hidden under the veils of traditionalism, prejudice,

misunderstanding and fear (Mark 7:7, 13);

- the completeness of the believer in Christ (Colossians 2:10), with:
 - total freedom from sins (Colossians 1:14);
 - union in His death, burial and resurrection and ascended seated position among the celestials (Ephesians 2:6);
 - adult sonship position (Ephesians 1:5).

This publication is the product of humble efforts of saints intended to stimulate the earnest study of Scripture. We do not claim infallibility for the contents of this publication; thus they are not meant to imply finality on any subject discussed, or that further research would not add further light from the Word of God. God's storehouse of truth is inexhaustible, so draw on its wealth by prayerful study. Our readers are asked to be as the Bereans and search the Scriptures (Acts 17:10-11; I Thessalonians 5:21).

This publication is not connected with any "church," "denomination," "movement," "organization," "mission," "creed," "meeting," "school," "conference" or "fellowship."

We are always open for discussion, but never for disputation. – André Sneidar

Bible Student's Notebook™

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shame-based obedience, and from the exhausting effort to prove ourselves to God.

giveness says, "You're no longer guilty." Justification says, "You are righteous." Grace doesn't just clear the charges – it gives you a new identity.

4. Grace as a Sovereign Act of God

Then came the game-changer: realizing that grace is not just free, but sovereign. It wasn't an offer – it was a plan. God's grace wasn't triggered by my repentance; it was written into my story before I was born. Grace didn't start when I believed – it started when God decided to love me.

I am not on probation with God. I am fully accepted, fully embraced and fully righteous – not because of what I've done, but because of Who He is.

5. Grace as the Highest Form of Justice

This sovereign grace led me to a new understanding of justice. Not the justice I grew up with – an eye for an eye – but a justice rooted in restoration. Grace doesn't ignore evil; it overcomes it. It enters pain, sits with victims, and doesn't look away. It also works with perpetrators – not to excuse, but to redeem. Grace doesn't just forgive. It transforms.

8. Grace as the Guarantee of Universal Restoration

Eventually, I began to see grace not only as personal but cosmic. Grace is not just for me. It's for the world. For everyone. For everything. Grace is not a soft hope – it's a sure promise. God will restore all things, and grace is how He does it.

The story of the world doesn't end in judgment. It ends in joy. Grace doesn't just win. Grace is the end.

6. Grace with Skin On

Surprised by Grace Again and Again

At this point, grace was no longer abstract. It had to show up in how I treated people. Grace listens longer, forgives deeper, and creates safety for both the broken and the ones who break others. In trauma, grace doesn't rush to fix – it stays present. In conflict, grace slows down judgment and leans into empathy. Grace doesn't avoid pain. It enters it. It's not just a theology – it's how we live.

After all that I've seen, written and experienced, one thing keeps happening: grace continues to grow. Not just in me – but around me. It keeps showing up as more loving, more powerful and more life-changing than I ever thought possible.

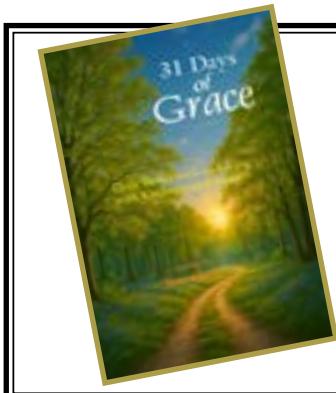
7. Grace as Justification, Not Just Pardon

I used to think that I had a pretty good handle on grace. But just when I think I understand it, it takes another turn. It stretches wider. It sinks deeper. It opens a door that I didn't even know was there.

I used to think that being forgiven was the goal. But grace showed me something deeper: justification. For-

Grace still surprises me.

(see [PROGRESSION, page 9027](#))



31 Days of Grace: Daily Reflections on Living with Kindness and Peace

compiled by — Steve Martin

31 of the most powerful and thought-provoking excerpts from *The Absolute Despotism of Grace*, one for each day of the month.

82 pages

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Tidbits of Truth #82

“Tidbits” is a column dedicated to short comments, thoughts, studies and excerpts.

I suppose that all who do biblical research wish at times that they could set forth fragmentary and unfinished ideas in printed form without people thinking that a final and definitive conclusion has now been chiseled into imperishable granite which shall stand forever as the final word on the subject dealt with. Any such conclusion will be far from correct. — Otis Sellers (1901-1992)

THE OPERATION

Our Creator creates and operates all, down [*i.e., in*] His good plan, to be enjoyed as all, in all. It's happening on a perfect schedule without a hiccup. What should we be doing? Exactly what we are doing, every moment. All will see, eventually, that you, I, every thing and every being, are a perfect operation of a perfect and infinite Being. Every being is headed toward an unimaginably good destination for all. If we're not enjoying things as they are, we're going to be just fine when we've been through the necessary unpleasant things. If we're not believing what is being said here, we will, eventually.

— Jeff Bohlender

“THE SPIRITS IN PRISON”

[To A.C.] Concerning these passages supposedly addressing Christ preaching to the spirits in prison (I Peter 4:6 and 3:19-20), A.E. Knoch (1874-1965) wrote very helpfully in his *Concordant Commentary on the*

New Testament.

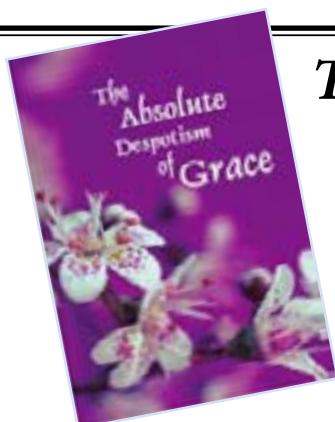
I Peter 4:6

For this an evangel is brought to the dead also, that they may be judged, indeed, according to men in flesh, yet should be living according to God, in spirit (CV).

This difficult passage depends, for its interpretation, on the force of the interjected “indeed,” which is usually omitted in translation. Even when present in the English, its force is not readily perceived. It must be evident to all that there is a turn in the argument, for the evangel is not the precursor of judgment from God, nor is it according to men. This judgment, then, is not God's but man's. Men judged them according to their own standards. They are judged, “indeed”, but not in the judgment of the living and the dead just mentioned.

The next statement, that they should be living according to God, makes it evident that the evangel was not

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preached to them after they had died. Men could not judge them, in flesh, nor could they live according to God, in spirit, after they had died. **They are dead now, but the preaching and judging and living were all a part of their experience before they fell asleep.**

I Peter 3:17-20

For it is better to be suffering for doing good, if the will of God may be willing, than for doing evil, seeing that Christ also, for our sakes, once died concerning sins, the just for the sake of the unjust, that He may be leading us to God; being put to death, indeed, in flesh, yet vivified in spirit, in which, being gone to the spirits in jail also, He heralds to those once stubborn, when the patience of God awaited in the days of Noah while the ark was being constructed, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were brought safely through water (CV).

A grasp of the apostle's argument here will help us through this difficult passage. The subject is suffering for doing good. The example is Christ and those sufferings which came to Him as they come to His disciples, because of the sin which surrounded Him. The argument is that He, though put to death, has now been exalted, even over the messengers and authorities and powers of the spirit realm (22), therefore those who suffer for doing good will also be exalted in due time.

With this in mind, it is evident that it is not the "evangel" which is proclaimed to the spirits in prison, for that would be entirely out of line with the argument. It would imply that, as a result of their sufferings, their enemies will be evangelized. Such grace is foreign to

Peter's epistles. The word here used is not "evangelize," but "herald" or proclaim. It tells us, not that they were blessed, but that He was exalted. And what is more likely than that, after His ascension, He should be proclaimed the universal *Suzerain* to all creation, obedient or rebellious?

Who are these imprisoned spirits? Are they not the same that Peter mentions in his second epistle (II Peter 2:4) who were thrust down to the gloomy caverns of Tartarus, and the messengers of Jude's epistle (:6), who kept not their own sovereignty and left their own habitation? The fact that they are called "spirits," assures us that they are not human. **The proclamation was not made to them during our Lord's death, but after He had been made alive.** It was a token of His exaltation. In due time all will be subjected to Him, not only Israel on the earth in the kingdom, and all the rest of humanity in the resurrection, but all sovereignty and authority and power in the spirit realm, so that, at the consummation God may become All in all.¹

— Clyde Pilkington

ABSOLUTE PEACE

[To: R.K.]: Indeed, a beginning point is Isaiah 45:7,

Former of light and Creator of darkness, Maker of good and Creator of evil. I, Yahweh Elohim, made all of these things (CV).

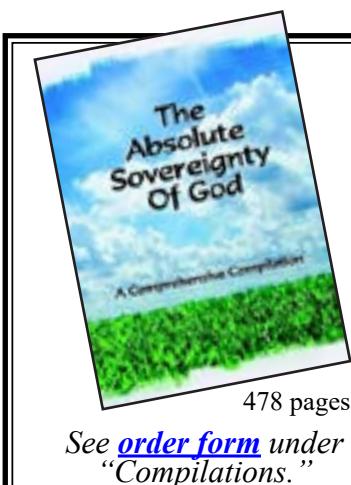
1. Additionally, A.E. Knoch also has a short 2-part article "The Spirits in Prison" which are in the *Bible Student's Notebooks* 406 & 411 and may prove helpful.

<https://www.biblestudentsnotebook.com/bsn406.pdf>

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The Absolute Sovereignty of God (A Comprehensive Compilation)

This quintessential book victoriously celebrates and convincingly proclaims the absolute sovereignty of God. Sadly, religion has veiled the truth of the God of the Bible, making Him either an aloof deity, indifferent to the condition of the creation, or one who is at the worst cruel or at the least unloving and uncaring. Yet the loving Deity of Sacred Scripture always has had and will have sole and complete control over His entire creation. This ultimate collection of 100 works by 34 authors spans nearly 175 years. It is an extensive reference work that is essential for every library.





And of course, Romans 11:36,

For out of Him, and through Him, and to Him is ALL ...

As well as Ephesians 1:11,

the One Who is operating ALL in accord with the counsel of His will (CV).

Contrary to all of our sensory perception and human reasonings, it is divine realization that leads to,

... an awareness that He is working ALL together for good (Romans 8:28).

We are each playing our role to divine perfection – even the antagonist.

— Clyde Pilkington

WHEN WERE WE EVER NOT “IN CHRIST”?

Evangelicalism taught me the need to exchange my lineage from Adam to Christ. Of course, according to them, this was accomplished by deciding to accept Christ as my personal Savior. This would be my primary gospel message as a young pastor, “You need to get out of Adam, and get into Christ.” Later I would come to understand that being “*in Christ*” had nothing at all to do with my choice, but is 100% God’s doing.

Yet, as time passed, I came to the greater realization: When were we EVER NOT “*in Christ*”?

The truth of Paul in Ephesians 1:4 began to settle in with me:

according as He has chosen us IN HIM before the disruption of the world.

Since we were IN CHRIST before the disruption of the world, then when was it that we got out of Him?

Paul teaches us that we ALWAYS have been “*in Christ*.” Our being “*in Him*” pre-dates Adam, and it pre-dates sin. Sin and Adamic lineage were only a secondary detour to bring about a contrast to what we already possessed. The concept of “transferring” our lineage is something that is foreign to Scripture.

— Clyde Pilkington

THE NEW BIRTH? OR, THE NEW CREATION?

Paul never taught the “new birth” – and for good reason: he taught the “new creation.” These are quite distinct concepts. Adam was not born, he was created. The answer for mankind is not to be found in a “new birth,” but in the “new creation,” where God makes “*all things new*.”

The “new birth” is not dealt with by Paul, because it is not something that belongs to individuals in the Secret Administration, but prophetically to the nation Israel.

The doctrinal context of Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus concerning being “*born again*” was “*the Kingdom of God*” (John 3:3, 5). This Kingdom will be the literal, physical, earthly Kingdom that was the prophetic theme of Hebrew Scripture, centered in the glorious future restoration of the nation Israel. Without being “*born again*,” this Kingdom will not

The New Birth

A Compilation

“Born Again” and “The New Birth” are among the many popular terms used by many believers. Although these terms are used by many dear brothers as being synonymous with salvation, they in fact have a very limited application, being used for the nation of Israel, and therefore are not “present truth” for the Body of Christ. Authors include: Richard Jordan, A.E. Knoch, and Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr. *See [order form](#) under “Compilations.*



be seen by Israelites (John 3:3), nor will they possess “*life eonian*” to live in it (John 3:15-16). Thus, prophetically, “*the rest of the dead do not live until the thousand years should be finished*” (Revelation 20:5, CV).

Nicodemus was a “*ruler of the Jews*” (3:1) and Jesus rebuked him, “*Are you the teacher of Israel and do not know these things?*” (John 3:10). According to Jesus, a teacher of Israel should have known about the *new birth*. So, the teaching of this second birth was not rooted in some yet-to-be revealed Pauline teaching, but rather in a past, prophetic revelation of the Old Testament. This re-birth was the theme of Jewish prophecy – a nation born in a day (Isaiah 66:8).

With all of the many faults of the KJV, one element that it preserved was the way that older English distinguished between singular and plural pronouns. Simply put, pronouns beginning with “t” were singu-

lar (thee, thou, thine), while the ones beginning with “y” were plural (ye, you, your). With this in mind, note the significance of John 3:7,

Marvel not that I said unto thee, “Ye must be born again.”

Marvel not that I said unto thee [σοί; soi, G4671], “*Ye* [ὑμᾶς; humas, G5209] *must be born again.*”

Marvel not that I said unto thee [ruler of the Jews], “*Ye* [Israel], *must be born again.*”

— Clyde Pilkington

TOPICS:

Major [The Operation:] Operates; Sovereignty [“*The Spirits In Prison*”:] Spirits In Prison [Absolute Peace:] Peace [When Were We Ever Not “*In Christ*”?:] Identification [The New Birth or the New Creation:] Born Again; New Creation

PROGRESSION (*continued from page 9023*)

I’m awed by how it keeps breaking through my old assumptions. How it reaches into places that I once thought were unreachable – both in me and in others. How it keeps rewriting not only theology but relationships, memories, wounds and expectations.

There are moments when I’m stopped in my tracks by the thought, “*If grace is really this good, why didn’t I see it sooner?*” But then I realize: grace has been patiently revealing itself all along. It meets me where I am, and invites me further. Always further.

I used to think that grace was where the story started. Now I know – it’s also where the story goes. It’s the way. It’s the wind at my back. It’s the light in the next chapter that I haven’t read yet.

I haven’t arrived. But I’m not afraid anymore.

Grace is leading. And the journey goes on.

TOPICS:

Major: Freedom; Grace; Justice; Justification; Love; Mercy; Salvation of All; Sovereignty

Minor: Restoration



***Paul’s Priestly Ministry* (A Compilation)**

Prior to the revelation of the present *Secret Administration* found in Ephesians and Colossians, Paul’s ministry was a prophetic light “*to the Gentiles*” (Acts 13:47) under the auspices of Israel (Isaiah 49:6), Paul himself “*acting as a priest*” (Romans 15:15-16, CV). During his earlier ministry, by his own admission, his teaching was limited to what “*the prophets and Moses did say should come*” (Acts 26:22), proclaiming “*the hope of Israel*” (Acts 28:20). This vital key is crucial to the proper understanding of the epistles which Paul wrote prior to Ephesians, letters which were “*out of an installation*” (I Corinthians 13:9-10, 12, CV).

58 pages

See [**order form**](#) under
“Compilations.”

This is a collection of eight important articles, by four authors: Vladimir Gelesnoff (1877-1921), A.E. Knoch (1874-1965), Adlai Loudy (1893-1984), and Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

The Hidden Hand

A Poem, by — Jeff Bohlender

[Click here to listen to this article](#)



Seems to me, there must be,
a hidden Hand throughout the land,
operating light and dark,
like a walk through a park.

If it is so, it must be,
operating you and me.
What to say, of this Hand,
and all the things It has planned.

Something now, comes to mind,
leaving all else far behind.

Thank you, Father, for all things,
small and great, crooked, straight,
and for Jesus, Lord of all,
Savior too of all who fall.

When I die, I believe,
I will wake and no more grieve.
When the rest, see His face,
they will also win the race.

None left out, no one dead,
all will rest their weary head.
No more crying, no more pain,
All in all, will feel the gain.

It was worth it, we will say,
see how good it is today. **BSN**

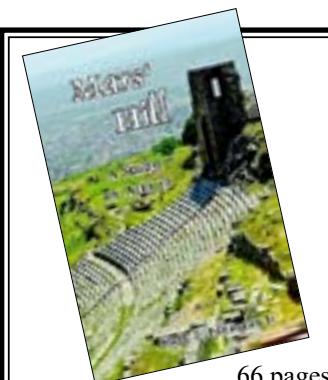
TOPICS:

Major: Poems; Sovereignty

Minor: Salvation of All

GRACE DIDN'T
RESCUE ME SO I
COULD WORK HARDER
FOR GOD. IT RESCUED ME
SO I COULD FINALLY REST IN
HIM. IT DIDN'T SAVE ME FROM
HELL. IT SAVED ME FROM THE
LIE THAT I WAS EVER SEPARATE
FROM LOVE. GRACE IS NOT A
TOOL – IT'S THE TRUTH.

Steve Martin



66 pages

See [order form](#) under
"Clyde Pilkington."

Mars' Hill: A Study on Acts 17

by — Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

Even among those who place a great emphasis on Paul, with his unique apostleship and message, there is an amazing neglect of one of his most outstanding messages found in the Book of Acts: his message given on Mars' Hill. The content of his message to this group of unbelieving pagans has been overlooked for far too long. These words of Paul contain a very rich message. Preserved in the Scriptures, we know that, not only was it a challenge to the pagans of Athens, but it will prove to be a challenge to the members of Christ's Body as well.