

CHAPTER TEN  
“An Exchange of Grace”

By May 2014 and with a criminal investigation underway I had credibility with just how bad a divorce could go. Now being formally charged I had to go to an arraignment.

At arraignment you are advised of the charges against you. I was not contesting the charges directly but basing my defense on mitigating factors. I had at this point no regrets for what I had done because at the time they seemed a reasonable response to an unreasonable situation! My defense was based on the information provided Ted. I felt the plan was sound but something still wasn't sitting right with Ted. On the day of the arraignment five minutes before the hearing Ted hadn't arrived yet. Mark was with me however, and when Ted arrived it looked like he had driven in a convertible with the top down. He was a mess and disorganized. We were in court with several other cases that day. We went in, took our seat and waited our turn. My case was called and the charges were read, seven different forms of misrepresentation in the family court proceedings. “Well, I thought,” “the DA had apparently cherry picked the file.” When we got into the hall afterwards I immediately pressed Ted on how he was using the information in the family court proceedings, and specifically how he had drawn up and argument regarding Judge Mitchell's decision to exonerate me under the circumstances. Ted assured he was on it but his response was unconvincing. I pressed him more to gauge whether he was in fact preparing a defense that was in line with our agreement and my instructions. He affirmed it was moving forward but said this was not the time to get “overly detailed” and that would come later. When we parted Mark and I looked at each other. I remarked I wasn't overly confident with what just transpired. Mark shrugged his shoulders saying it was new territory to him but noted Ted did not appear overly invested in the affair. I agreed.

The difficulties regarding custody visitation. The summer pick up at the Alameda police station resulted in police intervention to retrieve the kids as their mother decided not to show. She claimed they were unaware of the pick-up date and the time, despite their attorney being served the itinerary six weeks prior. I painfully remember Sergei's smile when escorted by the police, all of them walked into the police station. I was thankful for the professionalism of the Alameda Police Officer who negotiated the exchange. It was a rough summer. After Paula had agreed the twins could stay with us for six weeks we received a received letter from her lawyer demanding their return early. Unfortunately a mishap in the court orders offered a loophole they exploited. These incidences never happen in a vacuum and always fall on the children. Despite the difficulties we made it a great time that summer with camping, horse rides, mine explorations, fishing, picnics and consuming way to much junk food! I am in my element when camping away from urban distractions. It's a reprieve from noise which makes it easier to be more attune to God. I love the area around Creede, Colorado and the rugged San Jan Mountains of southwestern Colorado. I had vacationed there since my childhood and had even worked as a ranch hand on one of the numerous guest ranches that proliferate the area. This time was a little bit of heaven on earth for us and it gave Merry a chance to paint to which was one of her ways of unwinding.

In the middle of the summer I had to return to California for another hearing called status conference. I telephoned Ted in preparation for the hearing to follow up and make sure he was “on top of it.” on his end. Our position was the DA’s was presenting a trumped up case re-adjudicating issues already part of a trial decision in family court. Ted’s job was simple due to the overwhelming evidence I had provided him; inform the judge my actions were mitigated by my ex wife’s scheme, and once Judge Mitchell was aware of this, he dismissed her cause. Before I hung up the phone I reminded Ted to not let the DA misrepresent the case. I was as clear as one gets. The day of the status conference was busy indeed. Again accompanied by Mark we sat in the gallery as the attorneys went back to confer with the Judge. Each meeting seemed to last forever but was probably only about ten minutes. I had no idea what was being discussed was how to proceed in each case and the status conference was where plea bargains were made. Ted provided no information of this. When Ted came out he said “Let’s talk outside,” and we sat down in the hallway. “They got you dead to rights,” were his first words. “What are you talking about I responded?” Then Ted went on to tell me how the DA was playing “hard ball” and I was looking at up to 28 years in a California prison.

I was stunned....

“Did you tell them what happened in Mitchell’s court? I asked. “How can this be when the trial record shows my ex wife is a (explicative) criminal?” I was very upset and angry. “Well I did my best.” was Ted’s response. “You could go forward with a trial or you could plead to three or four felony counts and with no past history you’d be looking at anything from probation to a year in jail but no prison time.” I felt trapped. If I agreed, I would return in a month to a hearing where I would agree on the record to the plea. Ted had negotiated a plea without informing me and while I sat there in disbelief I didn’t know whether to trust him or dump him. He was my attorney though and he had just told me he had “done his best.” And of course he professed he was a Christian. So reluctantly feeling utterly betrayed I agreed to the plea.

One month later I was back in Redwood City for the plea hearing. The DA’s representative showed up all smiles and she and Ted conferred prior to going in the court room. After their discussion Ted motioned me to come in. I had asked Mark not to attend this particular hearing. The loss of face was something I figured the fewer the people the better. The court was full of families and attorneys with their clients all pleading cases down to less severe infractions. The hearing was a mechanical apparatus with a judge I’d never seen before. Ted quickly outlined my part. The judge would explain the plea agreement then ask I understood it, and then ask how I pleaded to the charges remaining. I was to say “no contest” for each charge in response. My turn arrived and I stepped forward. The judge read off the charges one by one asking me how I pleaded. Ted was standing right by me by me and whispered the “no contest” for each charge. I guess this was to help avoid any mistakes. The other attorneys did the same for their clients as well. Without batting an eye, the judge then repeatedly each of the counts and said “I find you guilty,” three times which was somewhat unnerving. I was told to immediately report to probation before leaving the court house.

After the hearing I asked Ted what was next and again he had nothing but more crypto-logical responses. He said he had to catch an appointment. We parted and I walked upstairs to the probation department. I was given a package to read and told to call back in one week to

schedule a probation interview which was necessary to produce a report used for sentencing. Still somewhat stunned from the ordeal I left the building to go back to Marks place as I had a couple hours to kill before I went to the airport. While driving I couldn't help but second guess many decisions including my selection of Ted whose agenda was murky. I was disturbed deeply and my faith was sorely tested, but I wasn't the same person bushwhacked by my ex-wife scheme four years earlier. The grip of fear and volatile anger had diminished by watching God repeatedly show up when I thought the worst was in store. What I had not realized was God's plan of refinement was continuing and He would break every attachment I had via the absurd, the unjust and the unknown; an uncommon path called the path to grace.

### **Launch the Discussion of Grace**

The most difficult issues in my relationship with Christ has always been to internalize or believe the promises of Christianity when everything was falling apart. Many of us have the same experience which is really the crucible of practicing faith. When trouble hit, I was used to ditching my faith, taking the bull by the horns and solving my problems myself and then believing the resolution of the problem was living the "Christian life." How incredibly misguided I was! I had religion all right, but little faith. There is tremendous psychological, personal and spiritual confusion when it comes to practicing religion verses faith. Many of us who profess Christ as lord have never learned to discern the difference as the narrow roads path never stops challenging us or confronting us in God's relentless passion to cultivate us into something completely opposite our human inclinations. Religion, is the by-product spiritual ignorance that's been cultivated by what Bonhoeffer would have coined "cheap grace" Let me clarify. American churches in particular have replaced what would be understood by early Christians as "faith" or "salvation" with something foreign, an imposter. It's an academic self serving Christianity *not* endorsed scripture but practiced regularly in American churches. "How can this be you might say?" To answer this in context of what transpired in my own faith requires a discussion of what "grace" actually is, which is significantly different from what is taught by most protestant pastors. I'm a protestant and have been for some thirty years. That said, it took extreme circumstances and a journey deep into the desert of my own beliefs to straighten out my thinking of what constituted New Testament faith. I am convinced the cheap grace alluded to by Bonhoeffer is at epidemic proportions in the American church and if we are to take the words of Christ seriously "If you love me obey my commands"<sup>1</sup> and "He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him"<sup>2</sup> we'd better wake up from the "great sleep." If Jesus words are a litmus test for an ongoing conversion or relationship to him as he himself indicated there would seem to be a church filled America with few people passing the test. No doubt this will ruffle the feathers of some and I can appreciate the critic "Who are you to imply the condition of another's faith or salvation?" Point taken. But if you or I can walk away from the words and historical reality of Christ without the conviction faith in Jesus will produce radical unprecedented change in your life I argue we have sufficient reason to question our allegiance to Christ. I got tired forcibly I might add of being disingenuous to myself and the message of Christ. This sobering crash of mediocre faith was partially caused by the churches misunderstanding of what we consider "grace" combined with my own apathetic

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<sup>1</sup> John 14: 15

<sup>2</sup> John 14: 21

response to grace in my own life. Grace mind you, causes a traumatic breaking of our attachments to this life and the complete reworking of our perceptions towards God, purpose, and what we hold dear. I found a comrade in this journey in the pages of scripture in one of the most well known personalities of the New Testament, the apostle Paul and what I found profoundly changed my life and made it possible to bear the impossible. But first let me share why our faith journeys go awry.

Let's take a look at the process of contemporary Christian conversion. An appeal to "follow Jesus" or "gives one life to Christ" starts with the tapping of the innate emotional, cognitive and spiritual characteristics of human beings provided they have not spiritually wrecked themselves on a pilgrimage of self indulgence that has robbed them of the ability to appreciate life and the divine with respect, kindness and value abandoning any form of self examination because they've destroyed their own conscience beyond the ability to respond to grace. These are those represented by the seed which is snatched away by the devil as represented by the parable of the sower as these individuals have by the way they have lived their lives and intercourse with God, rejected him and aligned themselves to embrace evil through the glorification of the self. Thank God, few of us (I believe) position ourselves so far from the reach of God. Most of us can be introduced to God as we all appreciate how the disappointments, the discouragements the real sense of "disconnectedness" is a result of a broken relationship we have with God. The Christian message is simple, this "brokenness" can and has been repaired by God himself in the person of his Son Christ Jesus. Easy enough one would think? Hardly. From this point contemporary Christianity becomes a spiritual train wreck for most.

The next phase of "faith" introduces the new convert into the principles and beliefs of faith, one being that this act of God to restore humans to himself, was an act of "grace" or favor towards mankind that was not earned or merited on our part. We teach this in orthodox Christianity emphasizing we have done nothing to merit God's kindness but have done exactly the opposite by transgressing God's laws and principles, resulting in unrighteousness personal responsibility for it and a subsequent spiritual condition warranting judgment. Many who come to the cross are unable to palate this reality and reject it. They may covertly accept the forgiveness of God but subtly reject this principle. It's too severe. God is too judgmental and unloving. Many professing Christians also reject this notion and embrace a modified palatable form of faith that believes one of two fallacies. One is there is something *intrinsically worthy* about them that compelled God to save them or after their commitment to Christ they become something worthy God is compelled to "save" because now there has intrinsic worth is acceptable now they they accepted Jesus. In other words they know they weren't "perfect" but there was sufficient good in them that alleviated eternal judgment and that God sought them out (was compelled) because of it. Note the operative word in the two concepts is "compelled." God is not *compelled* to do anything on behalf of fallen humanity. A good many people clearly understand the gospel and its cost i.e the life of Jesus but are unwilling to apply that cost personally, meaning they really don't believe they're so bad after all as to incur eternal condemnation. Their life reveals their beliefs eventually as their lives change little to nothing at all. They fail to internalize or admit their *personal responsibility for Jesus death on the cross. Most professing Christians regardless of their denominational affiliation practice this type of faith.* They fail to mature from the initial realization of the absolute need for God's act of saving grace to an understanding of God's work through grace. It's bad enough they never truly accept their own spiritual depravity, the tragedy

is they never understand the process by which the depravity is met and conquered by Christ and how they can live beyond it and yes actually putting to death the deeds of their broken life into something new.<sup>3</sup> Frustration amasses which produces disillusionment with Christianity rather quickly. Unwilling to resolve the dichotomy between their lives and their conscience they quickly adapt learning to apply what “looks Christian” to their lives focusing on behaviors putting considerable effort into manipulating the perceptions of others to appear Christian. They do Christian things, i.e. attend church, give, volunteer etc. However regardless of how we work out issues of faith, for it’s possible to remain a member in good standing in most churches without practicing faith, revolves around the following question. “If I am a Christian, what does that look like?” versus “What is it supposed to be?” It’s at this point the modern church has failed miserably in its explanation to describe what this should entail, probably because most leaders in the church themselves haven’t resolved the question.

Faith or belief as a follower of Christ that chases what faith looks like is not faith. Its self righteous legalism packaged very seductively but not surrender. This misdirected faith has as its object not the will and majesty of the one who deserves it but the promotion of one’s own righteousness and value. It seeks God on our terms selectively implementing Christian behavior and principles which reflect our personal choices and strengths. It dismisses the gravity of our standing before God and the call to conform to his will assuming we know better than God what the plan is and how to do it. It sells a cheap Jesus of “acquaintance” and most likely, never took the call to Christ seriously. It follows the latest church endorsed fad and seeks affirmation for itself not reverence of the one who affirms it and it’s guarded voraciously by the religious because it promotes dependency on church leadership at the expense of Christian maturity. Christians, if the terms accurate, slide easily into this comfortable semblance of Christianity and develop their church relationship knowing the lingo of Christianity but not its power. The sad reality is probably most Christians identify with this type of faith experience as opposed to its counter point, slavery to Christ. As the conscience of the individual falls deeper into this deception mistaking faith for religion they are satisfied with a moderately improved lifestyle. They know something’s wrong but after repeated attempts to fix it with more “Christian activity” they realize how impossible this is and slowly capitulate to mediocrity perhaps never experiencing the risen Christ. The great misunderstanding of what a Christian life actually is verses “what it look like” revolves around the misunderstanding of a very common word in church circles called “grace.” The clarity of which appears to be brought about and made clear through only one route, the venue of suffering, often extreme suffering.

For over three decades I practiced Christianity by laminating Christian lingo, thinking and behavior on the surface of my life. With laminate though, if you’re familiar with it, it’s often used to cover an inferior piece of wood with a superficial coating of superior wood to conceal what lies beneath. Such was my faith. Instead of basing my faith on an all powerful Creator that desired deep transformation from within, I cultivated my actions, behaviors and thoughts to emulate Christian ideals, and attempted to pull it all together through force of will. It didn’t work. I was trying to be Christian and Christ like by acting Christian sort of like the spiritual equivalent of putting the cart before the horse. In retrospect all it produced was decades of superficial spirituality and a profound discontent with life. I have to admit there were many times my faith was pushed beyond its actual depth as I portrayed a Christian that was

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<sup>3</sup> Romans 8:

incongruent with who I really was. You can't simply "paint behaviors" onto the canvas of life and expect inner transformation. God won't settle for that, his expectations are too high and this type of religious pretense by behavior modification fails miserably when tested. It is one of the indirect object lessons of the parable of the Sower.<sup>4</sup> Misplaced faith almost always confuses the relationship aspect of grace and how it functions in the life of a believer. The transformation for those truly in Christ is a relationship between grace, God's Spirit and the free will exercise of the individual through the practice of relational faith. Grace is at the center of this phenomenon doing the work as a divine expression of love. It's not our effort at behavior modification that does the work of the supernatural. It's the work of grace that empowers the inner change.

My practice of evaluating spiritual health by how successful I was at "being Christian" ran into spiritual crisis when the applied superficial behaviors failed to produce true transformation. My orientation towards behavior assessment in turn had me using emotions as an indicator of spiritual truth and reality. I assumed because I experienced depression I couldn't be in communion with God unaware that "God stands near the brokenhearted and saves those crushed in spirit."<sup>5</sup> Of course the adverse circumstances increased the problem so I assumed the increasing anxiety and adversity evidenced I was separate from God, possibly even unsaved. Keep in mind I was seeking God (or God was seeking me!) through prayer and intently through his word but when we build our faith relying on behavioral change or mimicking what looks moral or Christian we foolishly use behavior and emotion (the two are intrinsically linked) as the litmus test of our faith or spiritual health. We do absurd things such as equating God's favor with and absence of distress concluding erroneously about truth on transitory elements of life. All things aside, my crisis revealed an extremely weak and ineffective faith. It was as if Proverbs 24: 10 summed up my life.<sup>6</sup> Knowing something was drastically wrong and pleading with God to intervene before losing my grip mentally I found myself in the summer of 2014 reading a well known passage from scripture in 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians chapter 12. The subsequent work in figuring out what this passage meant for me personally changed the course of my faith forever.

<sup>7</sup>Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself.<sup>8</sup> Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me.<sup>9</sup> And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.<sup>10</sup> Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong (NASB 2003).

Now when I read this it's safe to say my faith was at a crossroads. But here was Paul 20 plus years Christian sharing about a personal trial which had occurred that had him beg for its removal. That resonated as the start of the criminal proceedings had me "begging God" for reprieve and answers. There had to be something deeper in Christianity than simply gritting my teeth with spiritual platitudes. I was doing that already and it wasn't working and if Christianity had any value it needed to provide answers or it wasn't worth following, and neither was its

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<sup>4</sup> The Sower ???

<sup>5</sup> Psalm 34:18

<sup>6</sup> Proverbs 24: 10 "If you falter in times of trouble how small is your strength."

Christ. I had read the Corinthian passage before but not in a season of trial. The Lords response to Paul made no sense. Grace as I understood it was the favor of God, what type of answer “My grace is sufficient for you.” If I went to a doctor or a priest looking for answers and was told “My favor or treatment is good enough for you I’d probably be arrested! *I had* to be missing something. I picked up a couple books on grace written by well known authors and received zero clarity but I knew a deeply desired answer was presenting itself and grace lay at its center but not the grace I understood. What was this grace that comforted Paul in his experience? What had I missed? And how was “grace” functioning in Paul’s life in this passage because Paul had an awful lot to say about grace. As grace seemed the answer I was compelled to follow it through Paul’s life in Christ and my belief whatever God was, he was respondent and ready to meet and honest attempt to find him.

### The Uniqueness of Trial

The trial that brought about this principle of “perfection in weakness” for Paul’s was no run of the mill experience or singular event. But it was a unique event in a life marked by servant hood and slavery to Christ which produced for Paul’s a deep fellowship with God seldom grasped in the body of Christ. It also produced a deep understanding of the phenomenon of grace and its expression in the life of the believer. How can we know this? Partly by considering the Corinthian letters testimony to Paul’s life *prior* to his conclusions in the 12<sup>th</sup> Chapter. If your familiar with the history between Paul and the Church of Corinth you can appreciate the novelty of the group of Christians comprising this church. At one point though a group evidently stepped forward for whatever reason and questioned Paul’s authenticity and his credibility as an apostle. It was a serious challenge. Almost as if a politically charged church struggle was mirroring itself in our day, this group was critical of Paul personally and professionally and discredited Paul by comparing him to others (the Bible does not identify specifically who they were). Paul repeatedly experienced this sort of diminishing of his credibility in his ministry.<sup>7</sup> Histories full of the ignorant, often untested usurping authority in convoluted schemes of self promotion confusing decent folk under the veneer of intellectualism. Paul was no stranger to it. Note his response to his detractors in the 11<sup>th</sup> chapter. Italics are my addition

<sup>18</sup>Since many (*Paul’s critics*) boast according to the flesh, I will boast also: <sup>23</sup> Are they (*Paul’s critics*) servants of Christ?—I speak as if insane—I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. <sup>24</sup> Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. <sup>25</sup> Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. <sup>26</sup> *I* have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; <sup>27</sup> I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. <sup>28</sup> Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches. <sup>29</sup> Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern?

The list is shocking, and without a doubt adversity that would break most of us. After the first 39 lash punishment, most would have changed careers. Paul’s is listing the cost of discipleship

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<sup>7</sup> See

over a decade and a half of following Christ willingly, which in itself is amazing but as the apostle recounts his life note there is no emphasis of a faith crisis. Paul is moving to a point in his letter which will separate the wheat from the chaff per say. No incident in this amazing list is a turning point in his faith that penetrates so deeply as the incident in chapter 12 when something new is revealed. A personal trial of such severity the apostle is compelled to beg for its removal. Many attempts have been made to describe the “thorn in the flesh” of chapter 12. It is not necessary for this purpose to go any further than what is already written in the apostle’s autobiography. The reason for the trial is clear; Paul makes sure the readers know it; to specifically prevent spiritual arrogance. The orchestrator of the trial is clear, the Lord Jesus himself. The mechanism or medium of the trial is also stated in perfect clarity, a demonic being. One can only speculate how difficult this must have been for the apostle especially after the list whom is allowed to harass Paul to such an extent Paul begs the Lord three times for its removal. Undoubtedly it must have been severe, but so is the list in Chapter 11 so what is the difference between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> chapters?

Choice verses control... or what we would characterize as human autonomy.

Paul’s hardships described in Corinthians 11 were the result of *his choice* to follow Christ. They took place within Paul’s free will commitment to his ministry and the call of Christ. They were so to say part of the job description but not completely unheard of. There are people in the world who endure terrible hardship for a cause to the point of forfeiting their life but they’re still in control... They believe there’s a payoff and if the payoffs removed they *will* walk away. They can be as dedicated as any religious martyr who ever lived. But what they won’t do is follow a cause into the absurd, endure injustice or forfeiting free will unnecessarily without a crystal clear belief in its *purpose*. That’s the dividing line. Human beings *will not willingly* relinquish choice and free will or abdicate their destiny outside of pathological delusion or something resembling cult mind control; not with any spiritual clarity anyways. The few exceptions only take place in the context of self sacrificial love; the parent for the child, the soldier for the comrade, the spouse for the other. Paul’s life as a slave for Christ was conducted as part of a supernaturally empowered life to “become all things to all men” where he repeatedly exercised free will choices to create situations to win others to Christ and while his suffering was severe, very severe in fact, it was within his “locus of control” per say. Grace goes beyond control.

The suffering, of 2 Corinthians 12 and the subsequent lesson shared was the culmination of how grace works in the life of the believer and separates the Christian from the religiously moral person. Grace when it is operating as grace incorporates all the elements of the suffering resulting in willing surrender of the exercise of control and free will producing the supernatural result of slavery to Christ. It cannot be read about, purchased or conveyed through education but must be experienced and supernaturally resolved. Now we can begin to appreciate Jesus answer “my grace is sufficient for you” and how it was understood by Paul. Now grace shows itself for what it truly is.

In the Greek New Testament the word grace is used some 156 times and it originates from the Greek word “charis.” I promise this is the only Greek word study in this book! If your “churched” your familiar with grace defined as “God’s unmerited favor.” If you’re unfamiliar the following may help. Imagine a king spontaneously summing you and telling you (your dirt



poor) you were to receive 100 acres of the best land in the province, a home and farm animals at no cost and you were exempt from taxes! It would change your life. You didn't have to do anything; it was given as an act of supreme kindness or "grace" from the king. This is the "unmerited favor" aspect of grace the Bible infers when it is referring to the aspect of grace that represents unmerited kindness or favor extended from God to us. The actual meaning of the Greek word for grace is considerably more complex. Note its definition as rendered by *Strong's Concordance*

“χάρις *cháris*, khar'-ece; from graciousness (as gratifying), of manner or act (abstract or concrete; literal, figurative or spiritual; especially the divine influence upon the heart, and its reflection in the life; including gratitude):— acceptable, benefit, favour, gift, grace(-ious), joy, liberality, pleasure, thank(-s, -worthy)

One would find the same constructs and meanings if using an analytical lexicon as well,<sup>8</sup> but the point is not to lose you in an etymological word study! "Grace" obviously is much larger than unmerited favor. So how did we arrive at such a constricted definition of it and how is it related to Christian maturity? That involves a short journey into how words are used to develop the translations of our Bibles. Don't roll your eyes yet, if you stick this out you may very well experience one of the most profound truths of your faith!

The good news is grace is not a new concept to the Bible. However at the time the Hebrew Scriptures were translated in Greek resulting from Alexander's the Great's imposition of Greek culture on the known (as you guess it Greek became the language of commerce) translators were confronted with the same problem translators always deal with. How to convey a thought or concept accurately from one language using the vocabulary of another! One can imagine the added pressure to translators as their product was the Word of God! The Greek word "charis" was used to translate regularly the Hebrew Old Testament word "chen." "*Chen*" was related to the Hebrew verb "*chanan*" which means "to bend in kindness to an inferior."<sup>9</sup> Why's that important? Because the aspect of "unmerited favor" was well known to the Jewish mind who were all too familiar with the issues of monarchy and theocracy. When the Septuagint was developed and translated the closest word in Greek for the Hebrew word form approximating grace from a sovereign or superior to an inferior was "*charis*." The semantic association was made. It was this aspect of grace i.e. unmerited favor that Luther was promoting (and rightly so to an extent) in his criticisms of the church during the reformation. Luther saw the frivolity of the church with such doctrines as "indulgences"<sup>10</sup> and the deification of the clergy as an affront to the ultimate king, God himself who's "grace" had been taken for granted by men. Luther was intent on re-establishing the accurate construct of "God's grace" as something not to be taken for granted or presumed upon. This takes place in Luther's "Solo Gratia" or "grace alone." However you've

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<sup>8</sup> Friberg Miller Analytical Lexicon. pp 407.

<sup>9</sup> Anne M. O'Donnell. "Charis in New Testament translation by Erasmus, Tyndale and More." *Moreana* Vol. 47, (July 1991): 181-182,

<sup>10</sup> According to Catholic doctrine "indulgences" monetary donations to the church was a way to reduce the amount of punishment one has to undergo for sins which may reduce either or both of the penance required after a sin has been forgiven, or after death, the time to be spent in Purgatory

noticed “charis” has a much larger meaning than just unmerited favor. Linguists refer to the multiple meanings for a word as part of that word’s *semantic domain*. New Testament translations of “charis” vary (and rightly so) according to the context the word is used in. For instance, “charis” is used where the angel Gabriel greets Mary in the child narrative of Jesus and is undoubtedly the dual greeting and “favor” or aspect of the word evidenced in how it is presented and in Mary’s response. Paul conveys this aspect of grace his greetings in his letters. In John chapter 1 in the personhood of Christ “charis” begs a more complex meaning. In Second Corinthians chapter 8 when Paul is directing the churches to collect relief for Christians in Jerusalem, the word charis is used again referring to the act of giving as an act of “grace” and the conviction to do it another aspect of “grace from God. When Paul closes his letter and references “May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Grace is the precursor in the list i.e. “the Grace of Jesus Christ, the love of God and the Fellowship of Spirit.” To assume grace is a separate component in a list of “elements of blessing” or consideration would be strange indeed. Especially since orthodox Christian belief teaches all three are one within the same expression of God as he “reveals the divine reflection of himself in the heart.”

So you can now appreciate when the New Testament was written in Greek the whole semantic domain was utilized when applying the word charis to the construct of grace. The key issue as it always is in scripture is context. So now we can on and leave our short and hopefully not too painful grammar lesson behind!

If we take Paul’s experience then and are able to generalize it so it has meaning for us today, the following unfolds.

This implies a divine act of love on God’s part that penetrates us manifesting the reflection of God in our life. That’s a lot different from simple unmerited favor because it implies the favor of God *imprints itself* into our very being and transforms us into the reflection or the image of God. In other words, God’s act of grace towards humankind was meant to rekindle and transform the image of Him in each one of us into the form image which represents relationship, intimacy and wholeness a reversal per say of the effects of the fall and return to the dawn of creation; Adam and Eve created in the image of God, walking in fellowship with Him. This is why Paul uses the term we are resurrected in Christ in (**Where**) to characterize this phenomenon by which “grace” is the conduit. While our transformation takes place in the world it serves the purpose of testimony of who God is as grace becomes the divine reflection literally “pouring out of our lives.” No the richness of “power in weakness” begins also to take shape as this transformation into what God intended is His divine “power” rewriting the life of fallen mankind “weakness.”

### The Relationship between Faith, Grace and Power

So when “grace” is used in the New Testament it is not assumed separate from this power of God or “dunomous” although aspects of it are referred to emphasize the favor and kindness of God in certain passages over the more complex phenomenon of supernatural grace. However, despite the inference in a passage on grace, it is never I repeat never separate from the penetrating power of God in the individual human life. This misunderstanding to teach what grace actually is,

results in the lack understanding and belief in the power of God which “perfecting itself in weakness.” Not only does it disempower the spiritual life and maturity of the believer it has the more sinister result of endorsing and sustaining dependence in the church as an institution. It feeds on the vanity of humans particularly those in power. This is why it is all too common for pastor and priest alike to stifle the growth of their membership. It is also probably the key reason why the church struggles with the issue of spiritual gifting. Worse still on a personal level “grace” is represented as some quantitative measure of knowledge attainment when its power is intrinsic because of whom it emanates from. The power of grace in our lives is supernatural occurring as a result of God’s favor which allows us to seek intimacy coinciding with a clear understanding of how far we are from the divine, how much we need Him and how unbelievably “gracious” his act of sending to Son to die for us is. Graces personal transformation, our impact on the world and our understanding of God does not occur outside of these spiritual principles. Salvation can exist I’ll argue but that’s a different argument.<sup>11</sup> You and I work alongside grace as an exercise of free will and obedience to Christ. So this issue of human “responsibility” is not relieved. We would do better to think of it more as a privilege. Make no mistake, the depth of your faith, the apprehension of the “peace that passes understanding” is directly related to your individual response to the power and kindness of grace. I was confronted with my very western assumption there was still some “magical” occurrence of supernatural power I was missing or some level of grace (or faith as I had the two confused) yet unachieved to provide the help I needed. Or put another way, I was waiting on God to deposit something in me that was already there. My lack of power and understanding in my spiritual life resulted from a misconceived and worldly perception of grace.

The same grace that accompanied Paul when he had control was the same grace that God answered him with, or actually reminded him he already had. Paul had to learn this monumental lesson of faith himself to be able to pass it on to the church. One of the essential aspects we can glean from the word and the life of Paul is that grace formed in maturity presents itself in its most supreme form through suffering. Grace exists of course and works in spite of ourselves but as it matures it leads to the eventual path of suffering because it is in this form the believer’s supernatural response and endurance of it most closely reflects “the image on the divine in our lives.”

Depth and maturity in Christ are never accomplished by shortcuts and comfort. Slavery to Christ is a permanent, lifelong journey that doesn’t get “shelved” at retirement age! If there develops some alien season in our lives were we lose hold of this truth we should seriously examine ourselves. The failure to understand and teach what grace is may be the greatest travesty of the 20<sup>th</sup> century church which is becoming increasingly suburban, middle class and unremarkable. “Penetrating grace” and its subsequent results and the human command to work along side of it is also the indirect lesson of the parable of the sower.<sup>12</sup> Grace demands a hearing in the life of believers and compels us to meet the impossible and confront it. Will the worries of life and comforts we enjoy annul grace a fair hearing? I suspect many reading are wondering at

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<sup>11</sup> It is critically important to differentiate salvation which is maintained by God from Christian growth and maturity. As the believer comes under the authority and power of transformative nature of grace administered by the Spirit, God is gracious in that he saves us. However we can be impotent in our faith, confused in our belief and spiritually undeveloped by taking grace for granted.

<sup>12</sup> Mathew ??

this point where the power of grace has blossomed (if at all) in their life?

I want to talk about Paul's "choice" at the time he received his answer because in it we have the very definition of "faith" as it understood in Christianity and as described by Jesus. We miserably misunderstand faith and its relationship to grace, not because it's complicated but because we don't accept what it actually is. Remember Paul in his request to God for relief represents anyone of our prayers to God for whatever reason but to believe this we have to discern if grace as we have defined it, is a reasonable answer... *to all prayer*.

A prayer request, simply put is made in response to a perceived or real need. They are complicated, some simple, certainly diverse and formulated out of the individual's experience. They emerge from the practical continuum of "I hope my job interview goes well enough to get hired," to "Lord please heal me from this cancer so I won't die." Now if we understand from our definition of grace that it penetrates the believer in a supernatural way and is administered by God's Spirit living within us and that is a supernatural intent to express the image of the divine on our image and reflect it in our life and then to the world that would lead us to believe all prayers, and all circumstances are subject to the law and phenomenon of grace as a divinely powered supernatural spiritual reality *presently* occurring in lives. Then the only thing that could prevent its expression since it is the intent of God transforming us into his image would be one thing:

Our obedience... or more accurately our free will choice to work with grace because we believe (have faith) it is operating as God said it would.

Faith is the belief it "is what it is" in this case grace and will do what we know it to do i.e. manifest God in our lives in radically challenging ways. But note that faith is demonstrated in and by personal choices. Establishing faith *as a choice of the will in response to an accurate understanding of grace* helps us understand what Paul understood in the situation at hand we now can see clearly why Paul responded to "My grace is sufficient for you" the way he did. Paul could have questioned whether grace was sufficient. It's inferred he did as he prayed for the same thing three times to be removed from him. However we can see that grace was at work in Paul during this trial because of the result. Trials and difficulties stretch the understanding of anything spiritual including grace from our end and Paul was no exception. We can assume though that going on his third decade of being a Christian and writing extensively about grace at this point and developing it to this monumental conclusion in this passage that Paul understood all the nuances of the Greek word *charis* and certainly our definition as well. We also know Jesus who knew his servant Paul knew the depth of Paul's understanding and when he saw his servant tried and tested and responded to a prayer plea (remember Jesus allowed the test) it was for a purpose; it would protect Paul (prohibiting destructive spiritual arrogance) but be in context of a response Paul would understand. "My grace is sufficient for you" reminded Paul the supernatural element of grace in all its aspects which accompanied him through all the ordeal of the 11<sup>th</sup> chapter was still in effect, still operating and God had not abandoned the apostle or given him something unbearable or that would not have purpose. And that purpose is clearly marked for us in the context of our definition, "My grace (My divine power and image transforming you Paul in to what reflects me) is sufficient for you," "For power is perfected in weakness." We would be well to remember, that trials no matter how severe, occur for the

believer in the context of this supernatural manifestation of God occurring in life. We can take comfort then, albeit difficult comfort it may be, that God will continue to create the image of himself through us and most often this image transformation occurs in the context of trial and suffering. So my own answer was granted late in my life as a Christian and on the receiving end of many self inflicted trials! Grace was sufficient for me as well and God expected me to live in it, in faith, in trust, believing in the good intent of God and now with a new understanding of grace. It was the trust thing that derailed me. Trust meant relying on God on things out of my control. I felt vulnerable by being targeted in multiple courts, the police, family who wouldn't? But the answer to the situation was still the same, "My grace is sufficient for you." The grace that sustained believers for centuries was sufficient to meet every need, every circumstance, every occasion. I had arrived at the end of the plank every human has to confront and resolve. I simply had to trust God.

I'm convinced our churches are full of people grasping to hope in isolation, anxious even tormented who understand "the basics" but remain "untouched" unmoved and outside an intimate spiritual relationship with Christ and subsequently with others. They may "look Christian," they may lead the church, again doing "Christian things" but are profoundly aware of something drastically wrong with their faith. Jesus worked exceedingly hard to counteract this profound isolation as Jesus "physically touched" people in his ministry over and over and over again. Jesus still touches us, deeply, intimately and profoundly through his Spirit through grace "the unmerited kindness of God, supernaturally manifested in the life of the believer which transforms us into the image of God restoring us to the image of his true intent."

Like many of you reading this book my understanding of the grace of God was no deeper than "unmerited favor." Trusting those who were presenting the Word of God over the course of my life I made the mistake many of us do in taking the easy route in spiritual matters. I relied on others to determine the color and shape of my faith. One never finds God relying on others to define Him. That's as senseless as someone telling a single person how great their marriage is and the single concluding they experienced the complete construct of marriage. Grace and how it works in the life of the Christian works in *relationship*. While it may be offered as an expression of Gods unmerited favor that's not the source of its transforming power. Keeping God's grace at arm's length cut off God's desire to move deeply in my life and settled for a spiritual version of "fake it to you make it." God remained far away and unconcerned with the circumstances of my life. I got grace and God was terribly wrong. However God s continued to respond back to my feeble attempts to find him as grace continued to work in transforming and expressing itself in my mind. Knowing God was up to something remarkable kept going and changed my perspective.

By mid-summer 2014, I still hadn't seen any formal investigative report so I telephoned Ted after the plea hearing and told him to make obtaining a copy of the investigators report top priority. I wanted to see just "how accurately" the DA had portrayed what happened in family court and frankly what my attorney appeared to be concealing. I received a copy in August 2014. What I read made my skin crawl. The DA had portrayed me as completely duping the family court and claimed family court had made an erroneous decision. Paula's allegations were all back on the table. Both hearings to force Paula to produce discovery were omitted, the deposition which implicated them in conspiracy to commit fraud and documented such was left out as well. The entire January 31, 2013 three hour trial, where Judge Mitchell reviewed all of

the accurate paperwork and determined there was no attempt to avoid child support was also omitted. The best part of the report was the DA claimed I still owed "the victim" over 155 thousand dollars in back child support. Not only was the family court matter deliberately misrepresented by the DA as well as the investigating officer, the facts and Judge Mitchell's decisions were intentionally misconstrued. There was no way Ted could have reviewed the information I had sent him and reconciled this report. Merry remarked the Ted, in his 70's may not be function at "full capacity" and could be suffering from dementia. Regardless I was saddled with an attorney who negotiated a plea in bad faith. Firing him at this point for any reason would create more harm than good. I would have to ride this out and somehow minimize the damage. I was convinced I was going to do some time in jail, how much was the question. That would be affected by interview with the probation department who would generate a sentencing report the court would use in its deliberations.