

The **BEREAN SEARCHLIGHT**

Studying God's Word, Rightly Divided

June 2012



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

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From the Editor to You

Dear Friends in Christ,

People often write us here at *Berean Bible Society* to ask, “Are you ultra-dispensationalists?” We generally respond by pointing out that the answer to this question depends upon your perspective. Those who believe that “the church which is His body” began at Pentecost in Acts 2 would consider us ultra-dispensational, for we believe and teach that the Church began with the Apostle Paul in the middle of the Book of Acts. However, there are those who believe that the Church did not begin until Acts 28, and to these brethren we aren’t dispensational enough! We consider *them* to hold what is sometimes called a hyper-dispensational position.

Some time ago, one of our grace pastors moved from a mid-Acts position to the Acts 28 view. Since the people in his church remained unconvinced of this new position, they parted ways. Not long after, the church invited me to speak at their Bible conference. While discussing ideas for a possible theme, I suggested that it might be a good idea to consider the arguments of the Acts 28 position in the light of the Scriptures. When this suggestion was met with approval and understandable interest, I prepared a series of four messages on the subject, examining the arguments of our Acts 28 brethren.

As I began preparation for these messages, I looked for a thorough consideration of the Acts 28 position written from a mid-Acts perspective, but could not find one. This became a cause of concern for me, and I’ll tell you why. What our Acts 28 friends believe is so extreme that they cannot easily make converts of Acts 2 dispensationalists. But these brethren know that, like them, you already believe in the distinctive apostleship of Paul, and so you are already halfway to their position. Because of this, some of them *target* mid-Acts grace believers, and because of that, you need to be thoroughly familiar with their arguments, and why they do not stand the Berean test.

With that in mind, we have posted the four messages I brought on this subject in the MP3 Audio section of our BBS website. If you believe that to be forewarned is to be forearmed, you may want to listen to these messages to prepare your heart and mind in advance of any Acts 28 influence you may encounter. While we bear our Acts 28 brethren no ill will, we firmly believe in “warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus” (Colossians 1:28).

Yours in Christ,
Pastor Ricky Kurth



When Things Look Bleak

By Paul M. Sadler, D. D.



"Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart. But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well-nigh slipped. For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked."

—Psalm 73:1-3

This particular Psalm, along with eleven others, is ascribed to Asaph, a Levite who ministered as the chief musician at the temple. After many years of faithful service, Asaph began to waver in the faith. With a heavy heart he says, "My feet were almost gone; my steps had well-nigh slipped." Most believers can relate to this having experienced the same struggle in their own lives. In fact, it is an all too common problem.

Notice what the stumbling block was: Asaph became *envious* of the prosperity of the ungodly. He made the mistake of comparing his life with the lifestyle of the rich and famous. "They have more than the heart could wish" (vs. 7), everything had been handed to them on a silver platter. And what was even more disturbing to the Psalmist was they had obtained their ill-gotten gain through corruption and violence (vss. 6,8). Meanwhile, Asaph had labored day and night to barely make ends meet. He had compassion on the poor, but the wicked oppressed them seemingly with impunity. It just didn't seem fair! As the old saying goes, the rich get richer and the poor get poorer.

The wicked in those days, as now, were not interested whatsoever in God and acted as though He really didn't know or care (vs. 11). And to add insult to injury, the heavens were silent! The Psalmist, on the other hand, sought to live a righteous life only to find himself afflicted by the world and chastened of the Lord. This caused him to ponder, "Have I cleansed my heart in vain?" The more he dwelled on this, it was just too painful for him to bear. "Until!" Until what?

"Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end. Surely Thou didst set them in slippery places: Thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors" (Psa. 73:17-19).

Have you ever awakened from a nightmare and felt thankful it wasn't real? For the ungodly the nightmare described here is very real. The Psalmist's "foot had *almost* slipped," but he was spared by God's grace and mercy in salvation; but the slippery slope the ungodly will find themselves on ends in terror. When things look bleak—Remember Psalm 73!

Living the Highest Life Imaginable

By Pastor Ricky Kurth

The last in a series of messages on *Living the Grace of God*

Imagine

When this writer was a teen, singer/songwriter John Lennon asked us all to “imagine” a world with no hope of an afterlife, no national borders, and no personal material possessions. He felt certain that to live life in such a manner would be to live the highest life imaginable. In this series of messages on *Living the Grace of God*, however, we are inviting the reader to imagine a life lived on an infinitely *higher* plane, a life designed by the Designer of life itself. If you are just joining us in this series, you should know that we are looking at verses of Scripture where the word *grace* appears, to see how God has been gracious to us, and how we in turn can learn to be gracious to others, thereby living the highest life imaginable by *living the grace of God*.

Abounding Grace

Our next reference to the word *grace* is found in Romans 5:20, where Paul says that “where sin abounded, *grace did much more abound*.” If you are wondering when in the course of human history sin abounded, could there be any other answer than *at Calvary*? It was there that man’s sin reached its zenith, as wicked men nailed the sinless, spotless Son of God to a cross, to be tortured and humiliated beyond comprehension. In response, you would think that the *wrath* of God would have abounded, not His grace, but such was not the case!

Throughout the course of time, it seems that God and Satan have been engaged in a little game of high-stakes poker, as it were. In this epic contest, it never mattered how high Satan prompted man to raise the stakes of sin. God

met each and every raise of the stakes with the same response: “I’ll see your sin, *and raise you more grace.*” When sin abounded at the Cross, however, Satan no doubt thought that God would surely fold. Instead, He met even this challenge by responding, as it were, “I’ll see your sin of the unconscionable murder of My Son, *and raise you abounding grace!*”

Now, may we ask you a personal question? Is that how you handle people who sin against you? No matter how high they raise the stakes of wrong against you, do you respond with more grace, with *abounding grace*? We understand that this is not the *natural* response to such offenses, but what do we know about the natural man (I Cor. 2:14)? When wronged, most people respond by saying, “I’ll see your offense *and raise you more offense!*” But when they respond like this, then the initial offender is forced to retaliate, the dispute continues to escalate, and it never ends.

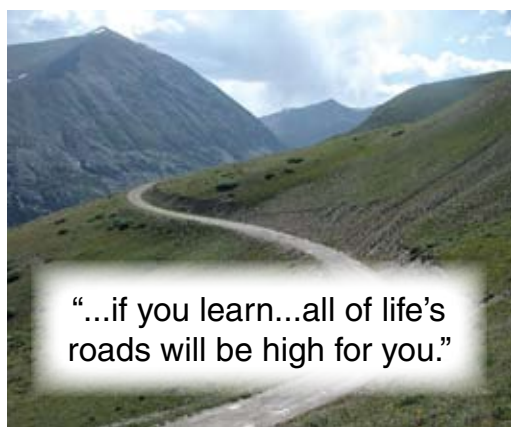
We can almost hear the reader exclaim, “I don’t do that! When someone wrongs me, I retaliate just enough to get even!” Yeah, sure you do. You might *try* to just even the score, but men seldom get it right. They either strike back with too much force and goad their adversary to seek further reprisal, or else they respond too lightly and leave their own sense of justice feeling unsatisfied.

May we suggest a third alternative? If you *forgive* the brother who has wronged you, *you are instantly even.* This revolutionary, gracious approach to transgression works every time it is tried.

The world calls it “taking the high road,” and we can assure you that if you learn to cultivate this sort of response to those who trespass against you, all of life’s roads will be high for you.

Continuing in Grace

After assuring us that God meets all of our sins with more of His grace, Paul knows that men will naturally be tempted to continue in sin that grace may abound. That’s why, in our next reference to *grace*, he points out that the only correct response to the grace that has forgiven all of our sins is *not* to continue in sin (Rom. 6:1,2). Of course, there will always be some who will do otherwise, and presume upon God’s infinite grace by turning it into a license to sin. If that’s you, you are not living the grace of God,



“...if you learn...all of life’s roads will be high for you.”

and you are certainly not living the high life. If you are willfully, deliberately, and defiantly continuing to sin against God because you know that He has already forgiven all of your sins, past, present and future, you are nothing but a spiritual *low-life*.

Now let's talk about how you can *live* this kind of grace. Do you have someone in your life who always forgives you—a spouse, perhaps, or a close friend—who answers your every transgression with more and more grace? How do you respond to grace like that? Do you continue to transgress, knowing that his or her grace will continue to abound? The correct response is to stop sinning against the one who always forgives you!

When you were a child, there were two people who always forgave you, no matter what you did—your parents! How did you respond to such unlimited grace? When you were very young, you no doubt continued to sin, knowing that their grace would abound. As you got older, however, you realized that this was not the correct response. Of course, this means that if today you are still abusing the grace of someone who always forgives you, you are acting like a child. Isn't it time you grew up, spiritually speaking? You can't live the grace of God if you are callously continuing to sin against the God who always forgives you, and you can't live the grace of God if you are continuing to wrong the brother or sister who always forgives you.

The Strength of Grace

Did you ever wonder what Paul meant when, in our next reference to *grace*, he said that “sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace” (Rom. 6:14)? We believe he was thinking of how “the strength of sin is the law” (I Cor. 15:56), and so if you are not under the Law,

you are not under the strength of sin, and so it cannot have dominion over you. Christians often wonder how the Law could be the strength of sin, but we feel it is through what the world calls *the power of suggestion*.

If someone tells you not to think of yellow canaries, your mind automatically conjures up an image of Tweetie Bird, the Looney Tunes cartoon character that Sylvester the cat was always trying to devour. That's the power of suggestion! The law against thinking of yellow songbirds introduced a temptation that otherwise you would not have been thinking about, and so gave strength to the prohibited thought by placing it on the center stage of your mind.

Now you know what this means, don't you? It means if you are covetous and you go to the store thinking, “Thou shalt not steal,” the law is giving strength to sin by placing it on the center stage of your mind. No wonder Paul says that the law gives motion to sin (Rom. 7:5), revives sin (7:9) and makes sin *even more sinful* (7:13).

Grace works a lot better than the Law. Grace starts out the same way as the Law, telling you not to think about Tweetie Bird. By the way, rather than yellow canaries, we used to use the example of pink elephants, an expression first introduced by the famous American author Jack London, who wrote about a man who was so drunk he hallucinated about blue mice and pink elephants.



You remember Jack London, don't you; author of *The Call of the Wild*, *To Build a Fire*, and other famous works? How many of you had to read these books in school?

And how many of you, while we were talking about Jack London and pink elephants, were thinking of yellow canaries? That's how grace works! It works by getting your mind off of the negatives of sin on which the Law focuses and getting your mind focused on the positive things of righteousness instead. Grace tells you to "think on" the virtues listed in Philippians 4:8, and in so doing, it steers your thoughts in a better direction than the Law. If you are not sure how this works, perhaps a few illustrations will help.



Joggers are warned about running along the road, since runners catch the eye of drivers, who then tend to steer in the direction they are looking. Similarly, if the Law has your mind looking at sin, that's where your mind tends to steer you. Tightrope walkers are told not to look down, for we all tend to go where we are looking, and when it comes to sin, you don't want to go there. So instead of letting the Law keep you focused

on sin, allow grace to focus your mind on spiritual things, and soon you'll be *living the grace of God*. You see, grace is much more than just a way to get saved; it is a way of life.

The Gifts of Grace

In our next reference to *grace*, we find God's grace working in a way that it no longer works in this dispensation. Writing to these same Romans, Paul speaks to them about "gifts differing according to the *grace* that is given to us" (Rom. 12:6). When the dispensation of grace was just getting started, God gave *gifts* unto men. If you're not sure what the Bible means when it talks about gifts, we need only look to the law of first mention for a definition, the law that says the Bible's first usage of a word defines it. Since the gift of tongues that first appeared at Pentecost empowered men to speak in languages that were unknown to them (Acts 2:4-11), a *gift* can be defined as a miraculous, God-given ability that enabled men to do things they could not do otherwise, such as speak in a foreign tongue, heal the sick, and other miraculous things (I Cor. 12:28). The Apostle Paul predicted that these gifts of grace would "cease" when the Word of God was complete (I Cor. 13:8-10), and they did.

Sometimes when we say that the gifts have all ceased, we are asked about the gifts of *ministry* and *teaching* that Paul mentions in the very next verse (Rom. 12:7). We always reply to this question by pointing out that while we still have ministers and teachers,

no one today is supernaturally empowered by God to function in these capacities. Paul speaks of men who have an *aptitude* for teaching (I Tim. 3:2), but that's quite different than a miraculous gift. The natural gift that some people have for teaching is similar to the natural gift that others have for music. These types of gifts must be developed by practice and hard work. This stands in stark contrast to Bible gifts, which are all of the same sort as the gift of tongues, the gift that instantly enabled men to speak fluently in foreign languages without any effort on their part.



The other gifts of grace that Paul goes on to mention in Romans 12 have ceased as well. A Christian might *appear* to have the gift of “exhortation” (v. 8), but such an individual is just “a natural” when it comes to encouraging others. In Paul’s day there were men with a God-given gift of leadership in the church (v. 8), but “he that ruleth” well in the church *today* is just someone we would call “a natural-born leader.”

In the absence of these miraculous gifts of grace, we firmly believe that *all* of God’s people should aspire to be engaged in *all*

of the things for which God previously gifted men with miraculous empowerments. Not everyone can stand in front of a group of people to teach, but we believe that God would have all of us teach the truths of His Word to our children and to those with whom we come in contact. While no one today has the gift of *giving* (Rom. 12:8), God certainly expects all of us to give financial support to His work. Similarly, “he that sheweth mercy” (v. 8) today cannot do so with any supernatural ability from God, but he can and should do so “with cheerfulness,” as Paul says here.

The problem with thinking that God is still giving such gifts is that believers tend to think things like, “I don’t have to support the Lord’s work; giving is not my gift!” This common attitude reminds us of a picture we once saw that depicted a freshly painted yellow line running down the middle of a road—and right over the dead possum that someone decided was not his job to move! God is no longer giving gifts of grace, but if you turn away from someone who could use a word of encouragement because you don’t consider exhortation to be your gift, you are not living the grace of God, and you are missing out on living the high life that God longs for you to live.

The Range of Grace

Paul closed the book of Romans the same way he closed all of his epistles, by offering *grace* to “all” of his readers (Rom. 16:24). To give you an idea of what a diverse group of people could be found in the “all” to whom Paul offered God’s grace, let’s back up a verse.

Paul was writing to the Romans from Corinth, where a man named “Erastus” was a member of the Corinthian church, and “the chamberlain of the city” (v. 23). This means he controlled the finances of this large and wealthy seaport, making him a powerful official in the Roman government. In our own country, the chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee is often referred to as “the *powerful* chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee.”

Along with this greeting from Erastus, Paul sends salutations to the Romans from “Quartus, a brother.” The name *Quartus* means *fourth*, suggesting that Quartus was one of the multiplied thousands of slaves that made up the Roman empire, since slaves were more often numbered than named. The point is this: when you went to church in Corinth, you would find one of the most powerful and influential men in the city *sitting next to a slave*, rejoicing in the oneness that they shared in Christ.

But this means that when Paul says “grace be unto you” to this same Corinthian church in our next reference to *grace* (I Cor. 1:3), he is extending grace to Erastus and to Quartus equally, since both men are included in this greeting. This will come as no surprise to the reader, for you probably know full well that “God is no respecter of persons” (Acts 10:34), and so He extends His grace to all men equally, no matter what their station in life.

Now how ’bout you? Are you gracious to *all* men, no matter what their station in life, or are

you more gracious to some than others? What would you think of a governor that was more gracious to the rich than he is to the poor in your state? What would you think if your child’s teacher was more gracious to the mayor’s son than he was to yours? Being choosy as to whom you decide to be gracious would make you like them. On the other hand, extending grace equally to the Erastuses and the Quartuses of the world makes you like God.

Close your eyes and imagine the Christian who irritates you the most. Are you gracious to that believer? Did you ever wonder which New Testament Christians irritated God the most? You could make a pretty strong case for the Corinthians! As you read how they were guilty of fornication, drunkenness, covetousness, and other such sins, it is not hard to imagine how irritating God found them. Yet He extends *grace* to them, and that’s what you should do to the believer who irritates you most—that is, if you want to be like Him and *live the grace of God*.

Over the years, this writer has tried to be as gracious as he could to irritating believers. We have found that grace melted the hearts of some, and drove others away and out of our life. We have seen these two reactions in the lives of others as well. We know a grace believer whose wife cheated on him three times—that he knew about—and he forgave her each time. But do you know what he did when she cheated on him the fourth time? He forgave her again. Eventually *she* divorced *him*. His

grace had driven her away. But I know another grace believer whose husband cheated on her. She forgave him—and it melted his heart. He never cheated again, and they were together until the day he died.

Grace is always the answer, beloved. That's why it should always be *your* answer, no matter what. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't, just like with God's grace. Sometimes rebellious Christians grow up spiritually and stop presuming on God's grace, and sometimes they don't.



But God never tries anything else, and neither should you. That is, He doesn't have a "Plan B" when it comes to those who presume upon His grace, and neither should you. As the old song says, "His grace has no measure...He giveth, and giveth, and giveth again." And so should you. It is the only way to live the high life. It is the only way to live the grace of God.

Rejoicing in Grace

In our next reference to *grace*, Paul thanked God for the grace that He had shown the carnal Corinthians (I Cor. 1:4). Imagine that! Paul was *thankful* that God had been *gracious* to the Corinthians

instead of judging them for their sin! This prompts us to ask: are *you* thankful when God is gracious to believers who, like the Corinthians, don't *deserve* God's grace? Surely you know Christians who are living in sin. How does it make you feel when nothing bad happens to them, when God just keeps on being gracious to them? Do you thank God for the grace which is given them in Christ, as Paul did?

Now let's up the ante a little. Not only did God not judge the Corinthians for their sins, *He blessed them with gifts* (I Cor. 1:5-7)! How do you feel when that sinful brother not only goes unjudged, he seems to live a life that is literally showered with gifts and blessings? Are you disappointed to see that he *appears* to be getting away with living a life of spiritual defiance? Paul thanked God for the grace that He showed the Corinthians, and you should too!

Living the grace of God is getting harder and harder, isn't it? Or at least it would seem so from the outside looking in. However, it is our firm conviction that being this gracious to His children is not making God miserable. Far from it! We believe He is rather the happiest Being in all of creation, and He has His grace to thank for it. You already know how happy you are to be on the receiving end of God's grace. If you really believe that "it is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35), just "imagine" the joy that awaits you once you learn to be a *giver* of God's grace!

Just imagine.



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CONSPIRACY AND PROVIDENCE

By Paul M. Sadler, D.D.

All conspiracies are not created equal, as we are going to see. Some are on a grand scale while others are small but, whether grand or small, one common feature is *deception*.

“Often the argument is advanced that a conspiracy on a grand scale is not possible because of a supposedly large number of people who would have to be in on the secret, and surely someone would ‘out’ the conspiracy. It’s been proven in the past that this is not necessarily true.

“The best known example I can think of is the WWII ‘Manhattan Project,’ where thousands of people were working on developing the atomic bomb, but only a very small inner circle knew exactly what was being worked on. Everyone worked on their own little piece of the project, and was told only what they needed to know to complete their own task, and no more. Of course, even this was kept secret as even small snippets of information could be valuable to the enemy, but it was possible

to pull off a large project involving thousands of technicians without the cover being blown, at least to the general public anyway.”¹

Generally, a conspiracy involves concealment of the truth. It is defined as “an agreement to perform together an illegal, wrongful, or subversive act.” Essentially a conspiracy is a collaborative effort to *deceive* and/or *conceal*, such as we see in the above historical account. A well-planned deception is always accompanied with *lies*, both of which go together like hand in glove. Although we would like to think that only unbelievers would be engaged in a conspiracy, the truth of the matter is that believers, too, often entangle themselves in these sinister schemes.

The biblical account of Joseph is a good example. The LORD had revealed to Joseph in dreams that his father, mother, and brothers would one day bow their knee to him. When Joseph told his brothers about these dreams, they were enraged at the very thought that he would have dominion over

them. Because of these dreams, and their father's obvious favor for Joseph, his brothers hated him with a passion. Shortly thereafter, Jacob sent Joseph to make sure all was well with his brethren and the flocks. As Joseph approached the place called Dothan, evil filled the hearts of his kinsmen.

“And when they saw him afar off, even before he came near unto them, they conspired against him to slay him” (Gen. 37:18).

As they were discussing how to kill Joseph and cover it up, Reuben caught wind of the plot and delivered Joseph from their murderous intentions. Instead they removed his coat of many colors and cast him into a pit. Afterward, when they returned to the flocks, they decided among themselves to sell Joseph to Ishmaelites as a slave, often a death sentence in itself. About that time, Reuben returned to the pit to check on Joseph, only to find that he was gone.

Assuming someone had sold Joseph into slavery, his brethren feared the worst and devised a plan to cover up their evil deed. Under Deception 101, they took Joseph's coat of many colors and dipped it in goat's blood to make it appear as though a wild beast had torn him into pieces. Under Lying 101, they took the coat to their father and essentially said to him, We have found this coat all tattered and torn and stained with blood; do you think it's Joseph's coat? (Gen. 37:32). The words of Sir Walter Scott's poem, *Marmion*, here ring so true:

“Oh! what a tangled web we weave,

“When first we practice to deceive!”

THE CONSPIRACY AGAINST PAUL

“And when it was day, certain of the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. And they were more than forty which had made this conspiracy” (Acts 23:12,13).

When we read a passage like this, the first question that naturally comes to mind is, what events led up to this *extreme* response to Paul's message? The answer is found in the events that transpired earlier when the apostle visited Jerusalem. Supposing that Paul had brought a Gentile into the temple, the people sought to kill him for desecrating it. When the chief captain of the city learned that a mob was about to kill someone, he stepped in and spared Paul's life.

As the Roman guard escorted Paul to the Fortress of Antonia, where he would be bound over for trial, Paul asked the chief captain if he could speak with his countrymen. When the captain agreed, Paul addressed his countrymen from the stone stairway that led into the castle. As he began his defense, the apostle spoke to the people in the Hebrew tongue. By wisely doing so, he had everyone's undivided attention.

Paul began his defense with the story of his former manner of life, telling of how at one time he had persecuted those of this *Way*, which the high priest, who was present that day, knew full well. At this point, I imagine you could have heard a pin drop. Paul then transitioned seamlessly into the story of his conversion to Christ.

He passionately explained, step by step, everything that occurred on the road to Damascus, including the Lord's answer to his question as to whom he was speaking: "I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest" (Acts 22:8). Remarkably, Paul's countrymen continued to listen intently as he began to share how the Lord had appeared to him in the temple during a former visit to Jerusalem. At that time the Lord said,

"Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning Me....And He said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles. And they gave him audience unto *this word*" (Acts 22:18,21,22).

What word? The term that enraged them was the word, "Gentiles." The very thought that God would send Paul to the Gentiles apart from the chosen nation was just too much for them to bear. This incited a riot: "and then lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live." Once again, the chief captain interceded on the apostle's behalf, having him immediately ushered into the barracks before the angry mob could murder Paul.

Of course, those present that day thought they were acting on God's behalf to put this blasphemer to death. They were so far out of touch with the will of God that they were acting solely on national pride: surely God would never forsake Israel; anyone who would suggest otherwise was worthy of death!

Throughout the centuries, religious fervor has cost thousands

upon thousands of lives—all in the name of religion. This is true even in our day of tolerance. If you think that the greatest threat to the true Church today is the erosion of our rights by the powers that be, you are sadly mistaken. In reality, the greatest threat to America and the Church is Islam, in all its forms.

According to the Koran, failure to convert to Islam means you are an infidel, and therefore, worthy of death. The Koran states: "Allah is an enemy to unbelievers" (Sura 2:98). "On unbelievers is the curse of Allah" (Sura 2:161). "Slay them wherever ye find them and drive them out of the places whence they drove you out, for persecution is worse than slaughter" (2:191).



America, to the extreme Muslim, is the great Satan. This is why, without hesitation, the Islamist flies planes into buildings, killing thousands of innocent people. This is all done in the name of Jihad, "a holy war waged on behalf of Islam as a religious duty." Mark these words and mark them well: the worst is yet to come.

The Providence of God

Over forty conspirators conspired that day not to eat or drink

until they had killed Paul. The *deceptive* plot would be set in motion when the conspirators persuaded the elders and the chief priest to contact the chief captain to have Paul brought down the following day under the pretense that the council wanted to discuss these matters further with Paul. This, of course, was a *lie*! Once the apostle was outside the safety of the castle, the terrorists would surprise the guards and kill Paul. Today we have suicide bombers; back then it would have been a suicide mission to attack a Roman guard.

Humanly speaking, Paul was a sitting duck, as they say, but the conspirators were unaware of an unseen influence behind the scenes called the providence of God. Divine providence not only perceives what lies ahead, but also makes a provision for the goals of God and always accomplishes what He sets out to do. It has been correctly said that “God is often behind the scenes, but He moves all the scenes He is behind.”

Unknown to the conspirators, Paul’s nephew overheard the scheme that was being hatched against his uncle. Under a *special* act of providence, God used this young boy to warn Paul of the impending danger. It is interesting that, after Paul’s conversion, we begin to witness a subtle change in the Acts record.

Prior to his conversion, God often used the miraculous to carry out the counsel of His will. Peter is a good example; on not one, but two occasions, angels delivered him from prison supernaturally. But when Paul comes on the scene, these miraculous manifestations

gradually give way to the providence of God, which sets the tone for the present Age of Grace.



While the Lord had revealed to Paul earlier that he would testify of Him in Rome, the apostle didn’t assume that God would miraculously protect him. You see, Paul understood that God’s promises were consistent with good old common sense, which Paul frequently applied in his life—in this case to preserve it. Common sense is defined as “sound and prudent judgment based on a simple perception of the situation or facts.”

This entire account clearly shows how God works in mysterious ways. It is nothing short of amazing that Paul’s nephew was given access to his uncle, especially after all that had transpired just hours earlier. Once Paul learned from his nephew of the plot against him, the apostle immediately perceived God had sent his nephew to spare his life. Without a moment’s hesitation, Paul summoned one of the centurions to take the young man to the chief

captain because he had something important to tell him.

Roman soldiers were not known for their sensitivity, seeing that they could cut a man in half with one swing of the sword; but we have before us here a touching account of an exception. When the centurion brought the young lad to the chief captain, whose name was Claudius Lysias, the record states:

“Then the chief captain took him by the hand, and went with him aside privately, and asked him, What is that thou hast to tell me?” (Acts 23:19).

Although we are not told, Paul’s nephew was probably around twelve years of age or younger. Notice the chief captain *took him by the hand*, which is customarily done when a child is younger. God had entrusted this young boy with a very important mission, which should remind us of our own children, that they are never too young to be used in the Lord’s service. The chief captain then inquired of him, “What is it that thou hast to tell me?”

“And he said, The Jews have agreed to desire thee that thou wouldest bring down Paul tomorrow into the council, as though they would inquire somewhat of him more perfectly. But do not thou yield unto them: for there lie in wait for him of them more than forty men, which have bound themselves with an oath... and now are they ready, looking for a promise from thee” (Acts 23:20,21).

Incredible! This is perhaps one of the most moving examples of the providence of God in the present administration of Grace.

The chief captain was an elite Roman soldier who was trained in battle. He did not take orders from others; he gave them. Period! Obviously God had prepared his heart in advance of the arrival of Paul’s nephew. Not only did Claudius Lysias give the young man an audience, he listened intently to what he had to say: “But do not thou yield unto them: for there lie in wait for him of them more than forty men.” Orders! This is unprecedented: instructions being given by a boy, a Jew who was despised by the Romans, and the instructions were received by Lysias with a sigh of relief. After giving leave for the young man to go, the chief captain sprang immediately into action.

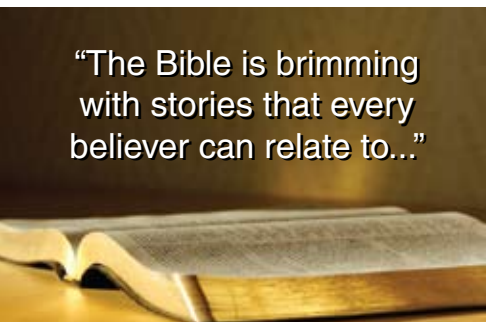
Intrigue

“And he called unto him two centurions, saying, Make ready two hundred soldiers to go to Caesarea, and horsemen three-score and ten, and spearmen two hundred, at the third hour of the night; And provide them beasts, that they may set Paul on, and bring him safe unto Felix the governor” (Acts 23:23,24).

The Bible is brimming with stories that every believer can relate to, including stories of intrigue. The chief captain spared no expense to transport Paul out of harm’s way. In fact, we believe he was glad to do so, seeing that he had nearly had Paul, who was a Roman citizen, beaten uncondemned, which could have put the chief captain’s life in jeopardy. But foremost, the last thing he wanted was to have a prisoner in his custody murdered. That could have ended his career, if not his life.

Claudius Lysias took this whole matter so seriously that, under the cover of darkness, he assembled an entourage of 470 bodyguards to insure that Paul arrived safely at Caesarea. In his letter to Felix, the governor at the time, Lysias explains why the prisoner was being remanded into his custody. Even in this, we see the providence of God; as is so often the case, with one turn of the wheel, God accomplished a twofold purpose: He had Paul safely escorted to Caesarea, and Rome paid the bill. Paul didn't even have to walk the sixty miles; he was provided a horse or camel as his mode of transportation.

“The Bible is brimming with stories that every believer can relate to...”




As the Scottish poet Robert Burns wrote, “The best laid schemes of mice and men go often awry.”² This was certainly true of the forty conspirators who plotted against God and His spokesman, Paul. They thought they had a fool-proof plan to take his life, but God left them to starve if they honored their vow.

I’ve often wondered what happened to those forty conspirators. In all probability, when they discovered their lives were in jeopardy, you can be sure that they found a way around the curse they had imposed upon themselves. In

fact, we know the Pharisees and Sadducees had built an elaborate system of rules and regulations around the Law of Moses (Mark 7:1-9) which undoubtedly left the conspirators a way out of their dilemma. They may have escaped death for the time then present, but they will not escape the second death! May God have mercy on them in the Day of Judgment.

We can certainly relate to what the Apostle Paul experienced at the hands of evil men. All too often we find ourselves facing similar trials when we stand for the truth of the gospel. But, like Paul, we should take great consolation in the providential care of God. Simply because God isn’t using miraculous manifestations in the Age of Grace does not diminish whatsoever from His sovereignty.

At this very hour, He is working in and through us according to His good pleasure (Phil. 2:13). While we often can’t discern the providence of God in our present circumstances, when we look back over the years it is obvious. Therefore, Paul could confidently write, “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose” (Rom. 8:28). Paul rested in God’s providence and those who follow Paul, as he followed Christ, should also find comfort therein. 

Endnotes

1. “The Curmudgeon,” “Conspiracy Theories That Turned Out to Be True,” <http://conspiraciesthatweretrue.blogspot.com/>.
2. Robert Burns, “To a Mouse, on Turning Her Up in Her Nest with the Plough,” 1785.

Keeping on an Even Keel



By Cornelius R. Stam

Occasionally we receive letters on the importance of preaching a “well-rounded” message. One old friend wrote us recently to the effect that, unlike this writer, he sought to keep on “an even keel” in his ministry, not just preaching the mystery revealed to Paul, but the whole Bible, and opposing fluoridations, communism, modernism and all that he felt was opposed to the truth.

Now we too seek to proclaim a “well-rounded” message and to keep on “an even keel,” but what does this involve? Is one who consistently proclaims the mystery lopsided or unbalanced in the message?

Were the twelve apostles off balance when they proclaimed “the gospel of the kingdom”? Of course not, for this is what they were sent to proclaim (Luke 9:1-6).

And neither are we off balance or lopsided in our ministry when we consistently proclaim what Paul called “my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery” (Rom. 16:25), for this is our gospel too.

This does not mean that we are to preach only from the Pauline epistles. Far from it. But it does mean that we should make sure that our hearers are well-grounded in the Pauline epistles and that when we preach from other parts of the Bible we should relate it to the mystery, God’s message for today.

When the twelve apostles preached from the Old Testament Scriptures, they preached Christ according to the revelation of prophecy. But Paul’s “gospel” was “the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery.” Hence when we preach from the Old Testament Scriptures, we should preach Christ “according to the revelation of the mystery,” applying, relating, comparing, and contrasting God’s programs for other dispensations with His program for the dispensation of grace. This is exactly what Paul himself does in Romans and Galatians, and this is “keeping on an even keel.”

A failure to “preach the Word” and to preach it *rightly divided* is not keeping on an even keel or bringing a well-rounded message; it is simply getting away from the message God has commissioned us to proclaim.

Since the faithful proclamation of this glorious message rouses Satan’s enmity more than anything else, we must pray for God-given boldness in making it known, like the Apostle Paul, who said:

“[Pray] for me, that utterance may be given unto me, *that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak*” (Eph. 6:19,20).



Question Box

“Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (I Cor. 1:10).

“It almost sounds as though Paul is saying in this passage to forget all of our doctrinal differences for the sake of getting along. Any thoughts on the matter?”

Perplexed!

Dear Perplexed,

Actually just the opposite is true. A recurrent theme throughout Paul’s epistles is *stand, stand fast, be steadfast, unmovable*. The apostle admonished the Corinthians again and again about their unsound doctrine and conduct. In fact, he advised the assembly to separate from one of their own because of immoral behavior (I Cor. 5:1-7).

We believe that Paul was counseling those who had *departed* from sound teaching in the assembly to have a change of heart, mind, and direction. They were the ones who were disrupting the Lord’s work; therefore, he instructs these troublemakers to straighten up and fly right, as they say. They were to turn from the error of their way so the assembly could again be of the *same mind and the same judgment*.

We are to maintain oneness with the brethren, but not at the expense of the truth (see Romans 16:17).

—Pastor Sadler



It's a Matter of the Heart

By Pastor John Fredericksen

In recent months, my wife's father has had a series of issues with his heart that required different pacemakers to be implanted. After two previous by-pass operations, there have been justifiable reasons to be concerned about him. So, when we see or call him, we frequently ask, *"How is your heart today?"*

The condition of one's heart is just as important in the spiritual realm as it is in the physical realm. It is for this reason the Scriptures say so much about the heart and why Solomon wrote, "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23). The spiritual condition of one's heart will determine how one responds to the Lord and, ultimately, it will have a huge impact on each of us in eternity.

Since God is "not willing that any should perish" (II Pet. 3:9) and "lighteth [or draws to Himself] every man that cometh into the world" (John 1:9), everyone has the option to be saved from eternal punishment. The Lord seeks with every individual to do what He did with Lydia, "whose heart the Lord opened" (Acts 16:14): drawing him or her to a personal decision of saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. However, because many resist and refuse this internal wooing of the Lord, they remain as some to whom Paul wrote in the Roman epistle: "But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and...righteous judgment of God" (Rom. 2:5).

Thankfully, many choose to open their hearts to the salvation God offers. Countless numbers of people have "call[ed] on the Lord out of

a pure heart" (II Tim. 2:22). Hosts of believers today seek to leave behind the regular practice of sin because they "have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you" (Rom. 6:17). On a daily basis, most believers pursue a walk that will please the Lord because "in singleness of heart, fearing God...[they choose to] serve the Lord Christ" (Col. 3:22-24). Many believers are "doing the will of God from the heart" (Eph. 6:6). Those who choose such a path do so because they are choosing to "keep their heart with all diligence." They do so by regularly taking in the Word of God and applying proper truth to the way they live each day.

It is, of course, possible for a believer to choose a path of sinful living. Every believer can choose to allow his heart to grow cold to the things of the Lord. For those who do, the Apostle Paul warned that, while still saved, they could reach a spiritual condition of "having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God... because of the blindness of their heart" (Eph. 4:18). Such a condition is the spiritual equivalent of a blockage to the heart. Knowing that as believers "we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ... [and] every one of us shall give an account of himself to God" (Rom. 14:10,12), it behooves every believer to maintain a soft, responsive heart to the Lord.

Dear believer, *how is your heart today, in a spiritual sense?* If you have made past decisions of sinfulness that have hardened your heart, you can choose to open the door of your heart and begin to live for the Lord again. You can begin today. You can begin to read the Scriptures again, talk to the Lord in prayer, and seek a church where the truths of God's Word are faithfully taught. If your heart has been faithfully following the Lord, "Praise His Name." May we all seek to apply the wise counsel from Solomon to "keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life."



21st Century Women of Grace Conference

Location: *Faith Bible Church*
560 E. Sauk Trail, Steger, Illinois

Dates: July 7-8, 2012

Speakers: Barbara Sistelos, *TBS Ministries*
Mari Edgekoski, *Women's Bible Teacher*

For additional information, please contact:
Johanna Bright at mommayaya@att.net



Letter Excerpt *Extra*

From Texas:

"Well, thanks a lot to you Dr. Stam, oh, and yes you too Mr. Paul M. Sadler. You all are in so much trouble. First, I have a master's degree in theology and I'm now working on my doctorate in divinity. I was doing just fine until all of you opened up my eyes to the Word of God rightly divided. Now you have gotten me into trouble with everyone, both at the Bible college I attend, and at church! Thanks (smile). Just from the little that I've gotten from your *Searchlight* I have caused an uproar...

"I love you guys because you have shown me the truth. I don't know what happened but I have fallen back in love with the Word. Man, Pastor, I don't know how to thank you all, but to do the best I can to teach every thing I learn to faithful men so they can do the same."

Northeast Texas Regional Bible Conference

Sponsored by *Berean Bible Society*

Dates: September 7-8, 2012

Location: *Admiral Hotel*
1507 N. Watson Road, Arlington, Texas

Speaker: Pastor John Fredericksen, *Berean Bible Society*

For more information or directions, please contact:

Dave Allen (214) 501-3445

For room reservations, call (877) 784-6835

The Spirit of Holiness



"...Jesus Christ...was...declared to be the Son of God...according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:3,4).

What does it mean that the Lord's resurrection declared Him to be the Son of God *according to the spirit of holiness*? Well, have you ever heard it said that there is a difference between the *letter* of the law and the *spirit* of the law? When you drive 66 m.p.h. in a 65 m.p.h. zone, you are breaking the letter of the law, but you are not breaking the spirit of the law. The spirit of the law is for you to drive safely and responsibly. This is why most police officers will not ticket you for going one mile per hour over the speed limit.

The letter of the law of *holiness* is expressed well in Proverbs 17:15:

"He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the Lord."

But isn't that what God did at the Cross, when He condemned "that Just One" (Acts 22:14) and justified wicked sinners such as ourselves? In so doing, He surely broke the letter of the law of holiness.

Or did He? For those who would argue that God was not acting in accord with the law of holiness, we would reply that when God the Father took your sins and placed them on the Lord Jesus Christ at Calvary, He justly *condemned* the One who was *made* wicked (II Cor. 5:21). Then when you believed the gospel, God took His righteousness and put it on you, enabling Him to justify the ones who were *made* the very righteousness of God in Christ (II Cor. 5:21). The resurrection of Christ then proved that this was also done in perfect accord with the spirit of holiness, for Christ's sacrifice surely satisfied the just demands of God's righteousness.

If you haven't yet trusted Christ as your Savior, however, God has not yet given you the righteousness that is available only in Christ. Speaking of the Lord Jesus, the Apostle Paul says,

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

The forgiveness of sins purchased by Christ's blood is only available *in Him*. If you are not in Christ, you are still "in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1). "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved*" (Acts 16:31).

—Pastor Ricky Kurth

Georgia Bible Conference

Dates: August 18-19, 2012

Location: *Grace Fellowship*, Thomson, Georgia

Guest Speaker:

Pastor Ricky Kurth, *Berean Bible Society*

For further information, please contact:

Pastor Tim Lewis (706) 799-6819

How Do You Want to Be Remembered?

On April 7th, 2012, newsman Mike Wallace, who anchored the program “60 Minutes,” died at age 92. For several days, the media paid tribute to him, recounting his career. The recurring theme was that the most memorable thing about Mike Wallace was his aggressive, confrontational style of journalism, of asking hard or offensive questions. Once Mike was asked, “How do you want to be remembered?” He responded, “Tough, but fair.” Since all of us will one day face death, *we should decide now how we want to be remembered.* Perhaps the best way to be remembered was as Joshua was. When he died, he was called, “the servant of the Lord” (Judges 2:8). Such a legacy is a testimony of spiritual priority—godly influence on others, and a life lived for something eternally important. *How do you want to be remembered?* Each of us basically decides by decisions we make now.

—Pastor John Fredericksen



BBS Letter Excerpts

From Australia:

"I read your testimony of the gospel of the grace of God and I have made a personal decision to trust in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ to pay for my sins and to be the means God provided, in His love for me, to receive eternal life. Thank you for explaining it so clearly from the Word of God." (Welcome to the family of God!—Ed).

From Pennsylvania:

"It is a shock to give up what I previously believed was the whole truth....I am a senior with a heavy heart, and an alert and hungry mind to know God's Word."

From Michigan:

"I have been at this facility for over a year now, and have shared the Pauline mystery with a few individuals here. I have had the opportunity of sharing this wonderful mystery with the chaplain here at this correctional facility, and in doing so he has come to see the great revelation of our unity in Christ, and the unsearchable riches of Christ. He has begun sharing this message in detail in our Bible studies."

From Illinois:

"Special thanks to Pastors Paul and Kevin Sadler and the Berean family for all of the past assistance in helping me to understand the dispensation of grace....I am almost 67 years young, and didn't know how much I didn't know and hadn't been taught!"

From our Inbox:

"Thank you for getting back to me! Your ministry is an immense blessing to me and my family. I have been saved for over 18 years, and after 14 years in the *Independent Fundamental Baptist Movement*, I am proud to be a grace believer that stands for God's Word, rightly divided! As a family, we are astounded by how gracious the Lord is to open His Word up to us even after many years of being saved. I knew for many years that the IFB was not for me, but didn't know where to turn. Praise the Lord He always comes through! We're still looking for a church home, so please keep us in prayer!"

From Michigan:

"There are times when I need the doctrine of Berean grace churches, but I have to say my heart is grieved because I believe you are teaching some inaccuracies, i.e., baptism in water, etc. But I always enjoy your church's unique spiritual perspective and challenge to my understanding and belief." (Please pray for this Berean as he searches the Scriptures in the reply we sent him.—Ed).

From our Inbox:

"I just wanted you to know that I am finishing watching the DVD, *What It Means to Be a Grace Believer* and I am learning so much from it. Thank you very much. I also have finished a number of other books you have written along with Pastor Stam's works and other grace authors."

From our Inbox:

"I have been a Pauline dispensationalist for over 40 years. I truly am blessed by your *Two Minutes with the Bible* emails that you send me. Also, I have read and shared some of the other writings that you have available. Your publications really uplift me! I am retired and somewhat disabled, so I spend much time on the internet. Your website is one of my favorite places. The truths that you proclaim are needed so much in these days! There is too much confusion, not only in the secular world, but also in Christian circles. The truth of rightly dividing the Word is so drastically needed. Those with whom I share this knowledge are very grateful and overwhelmed with finally being able to understand the Word of God so much better."

From Ohio:

"I just finished reading an article by Paul Sadler entitled, *Unity in the Bond of Peace*. This article made me realize that my ungodly, unloving response to you, Pastor Kurth, was totally uncalled for, and I am writing to tell you I was wrong and desire your forgiveness for hurting you my dear brother in Christ. Please forgive me, Pastor Kurth." (We've received far worse letters, but it is great to see God's grace working in your life!—Ed).

From Michigan:

"I started to use *Now That I Believe* to open the grace message to others. I really like the question-and-answer format that you use, and the Scripture backing is unparalleled for such a beginning booklet. The two people I am currently leading in study have given me great feedback on this booklet."

From Indiana:

"I remember when I realized I was rightly dividing the Word. I was sitting, listening to Pastor Kurth for the first time....I could see what I had been studying in the Bible for years and all the questions that I had now had answers—answers that I knew but didn't know that I knew. The answer was the message of grace, the gospel of grace given to us by the Apostle Paul. It was right there in front of me the whole time. I read over it for years and years. I thought I understood what grace meant but I was missing key information."

From Missouri:

"Greetings in the blessed name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Pastor Sadler. This is to let you know how very profitable I found your book, *Triumph of His Grace*. I've sent it on trusting it will bless another life."

From Florida:

"*Is Israel Really Back in the Land?*... opened up my thinking. I've thought for some time that the gathering of the Jews in 1948 did not match what God's Word was saying."

From our Inbox:

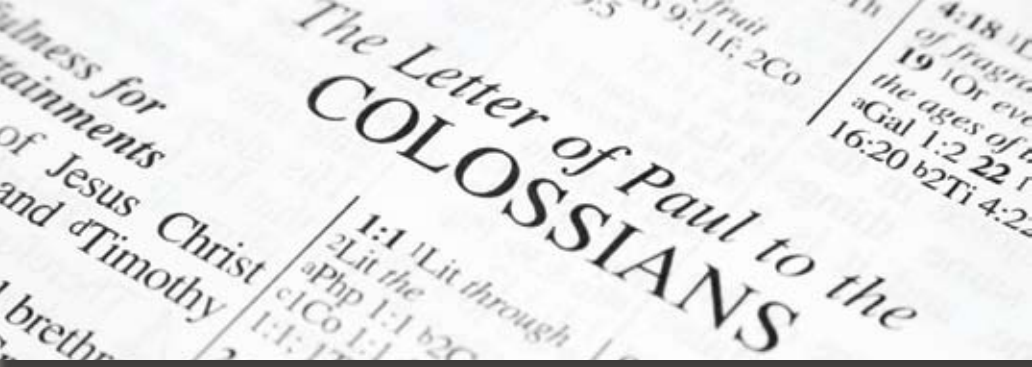
"Thanks for taking the time to answer my question!...your ministry has been a huge blessing in my life, and also in that of my family. It has been three generations learning from the *Searchlight*, and the rest of your literature."

From Nevada:

"I send so little, yet I receive a thank you letter, which thrills my heart! God's blessings." (Pastor Stam always said, "My mother taught me to say thank you."—Ed).



"These [Bereans] were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the Word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so."
—Acts 17:11



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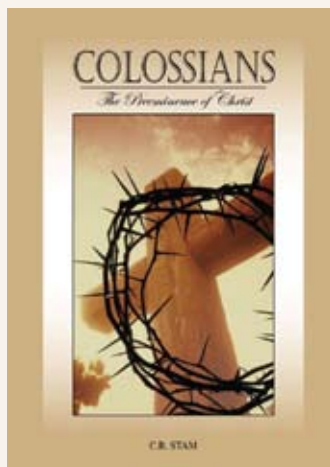
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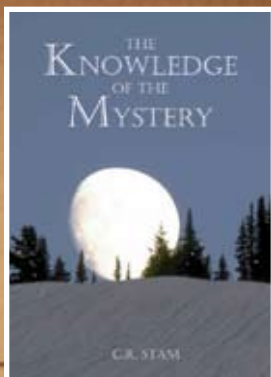
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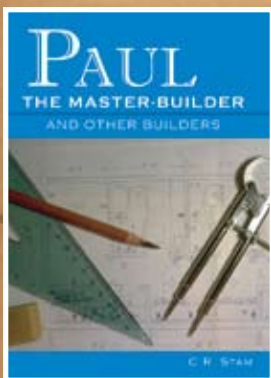
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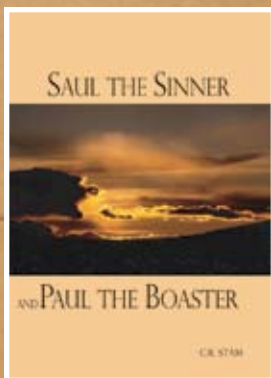
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News and Announcements

BBS is now on iTunes! At the request of our MP3 listeners, we have created an iTunes podcast of the audio sermons that we add to our website. This means that by subscribing through iTunes, you will automatically receive each new audio message as it is added to our site. It also means that our messages will now show up in searches on iTunes, giving the grace message even more exposure. To enroll, just follow the iTunes link at the top right of our MP3 Audio page. There is also an option to subscribe by email or RSS.

Celebrate Grace Camp: Our dear friends Jerry & Judy Worthley have invited Pastor Jeff Seekins to share God's rightly divided Word at this year's meetings, to be held once again at the beautiful *Mountaintop Retreat* near Montrose, Colorado. Just call them at (719) 371-3068 and they'll be happy to tell you about all that you'll be missing if you make other plans for August 3-5!

Grace Believers' Bible Conference: One of the spiritual delights of summer will take place once again in Bitely, Michigan, as the warm-hearted saints of the *Bitely Community Church* welcome BBS's own Kevin Sadler and several other grace pastors, all of whom have been invited to speak on subjects of their own choosing. Mark your calendar for August 3-5, and call Pastor Ken Lyon for further information: (231) 745-9595.

If Georgia's on your mind we have just the conference for you! The saints of *Grace Fellowship* of Thomson, GA, have invited your editor to come feed their hungry hearts with messages that are sure to nourish your soul as well. For your personal invitation and further info about this August 18th-19th get-together, call Pastor Tim Lewis at (706) 799-6819.

Insights into Islam: Our good friend Joel McGarvey will present a five hour seminar on Islam at the *Mid-Atlantic Fall Grace Bible Conference* at White Sulfur Springs in Mann's Choice, Pennsylvania. After talking to Suzanne Potter (304-263-2411) you'll know why this will be the place to be on September 7-9.



The *Pointe-à-la-Renommée Lighthouse* is located in Quebec, Canada. It is billed as "the world's most travelled lighthouse" due to the fact that it was built in 1906 in its current location, then was moved in 1977 and spent 20 years in Quebec City, only to be moved back to its original location in 1997.

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of all principality and power” (Col. 2:9,10).