

Worship services are being cancelled until further notice because of Covid-19. However, we will have worship services through the Internet Zoom platform every Sunday at 10:30 AM. The Zoom link for this service will be sent to you by email. The phone number for Zoom always remains the same but the Meeting ID and password number changes every week. If you need more information, please contact Mr. Vautour. See the bottom of the bulletin the contact information.

If you have friends or acquaintances who want to join in the worship service, please do not hesitate to share with them the Zoom links to join with us in the worship our great God.

The National GCI services will be at 1:00 p.m. each Sunday. The Zoom link sent to you yesterday by email will remain the same until further notice.

For more information about special activities happening in GCI, please see the international website at www.gci.org. On the left-hand upper side of the screen, you will see 3 short lines. You simply need to click on it. A drop down menu will appear. Click on "**PARTICIPATE**".

Please note that audio sermons are available and a PDF copy of sermons are available at www.worshiphim.ca and video sermons are now available on YouTube – GRACE COMMUNION INTERNATIONAL-MONCTON (see link below)

If you have a prayer requests, other events you would like to announce and/or praise to our great God you would like to share, **please try to contact Mr. Vautour by email, text or telephone no later than Saturday, in the morning.**

Mr. Bruce Coulson, long time GCI member, will be 101 yrs. old on May 15. If you want to send him a card, please write Mr. Vautour for his address.

Ravi Zacharias' obituary, world evangelist who died May 19, 2020, can be found at: <https://chvnradio.com/christian-news/obituary-ravi-zacharias-1946-2020>

Ravi Zacharias International Ministries (RZIM) says that everyone will be able to join them online next week for a streaming service celebrating the life of the beloved apologist.

On Friday, May 29, at 11:00 am Eastern Time (12 p.m. Atlantic time), RZIM will be streaming a memorial service to honour the late apologist, Ravi Zacharias, on Facebook and Youtube.

The service will include tributes to Ravi by those who knew him well. This will include performances by Christian artists Matt Redman and Lecrae.

RZIM President Michael Ramsden will be sharing, alongside former NFL quarterback Tim Tebow, and other family and friends.

How the first disciples of Jesus responded to the apostles' teaching:

1- "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching
2- and fellowship,

3- to the breaking of bread
4- and the prayers." (Ac 2:42 ESV)

Bible verses about praying together (from <https://biblereasons.com/praying-together/>)

In your Christian walk of faith it is important to pray together with other believers. Not only with your church, but with friends, your spouse, and other family members as well. There are some people who are a little afraid when it comes to praying out loud, but there is nothing wrong with praying silently while others pray out loud until that person becomes more comfortable.

Corporate prayer opens up your heart to the needs of others. Not only does it bring encouragement, repentance, edification, joy, and the feeling of love among believers, but it shows togetherness and the body of Christ working together submitting to the will of God.

Prayer meetings should never be to show off or gossip like we see in many of the churches today in America. Praying together is not a secret formula that makes your prayers more powerful so God will answer your personal desires that are not his will.

In prayer we are to align our lives with God's purpose leaving our desires behind and when it's all about God and his divine will we can have confidence that our prayers will be answered. Always remember it's all about his glory and the advancement of his kingdom.

Offerings: you can send your offering directly to the following address: **Grace Communion International- Canada, Suite 203A, 2121 Airport Dr., Saskatoon, SK 7S1 6W5.** If you prefer, you can also call **1-306-653-2705.** Thank you for your continued generous giving to God by giving to this part of God's church, his body.

From Mr. Bill Hall – GCI Canadian Director *"Our office here in Saskatoon will remain open during regular business hours. I'm self isolating for a couple of weeks, but Kathleen will be available. We will continue to process the donations we receive in Saskatoon. Members are urged to mail them directly to our office for the time-being. They can also donate via phone using a credit card, or via Canada Helps using the donate button on our website www.gcicanada.ca We are waving the provision that all donations given via Canada Helps go toward national expenses for the time being. We will credit all donations received via Canada Helps to a member's local congregation, if we can identify where they attend."*

The Bible's Big Story, by Michael Morrison (from: <https://www.gcs.edu/mod/page/view.php?id=4251>)

Some look at the Bible as a window into ancient history, as literature telling us about what the ancient Hebrews thought about God, just as the *Iliad* tells us what some ancient Greeks thought about their gods. At the opposite end of the spectrum, some people view the Bible as a word-for-word transcription of the words of God, as he dictated to the writers he choose.[1] In other words, some see it as a purely human book; others as a purely divine book, when in reality it is a mixture of both.

The Bible is one of the instruments God uses to reveal himself to us – and God uses it to reveal something about ourselves, too. The Bible shows us how we fit into the purpose and plan of God. So we will begin by sketching the outlines of the story, so that we have the bigger picture in mind as we begin to read some of the details.

Some might see the Bible as a mystery story, in which we do not know what's going on until it all reaches the finale. But in order to de-mystify the Bible, we are going to begin by seeing how it all ends, and that will not only be a source of encouragement and inspiration, it will also help us to read with more understanding of how various events are pointing toward the final conclusion.

[1] If God dictated every word, it is difficult to understand why he did not use the same vocabulary and grammar throughout, or why he would dictate the mistake that we see in **1 Cor. 1:14**. We may not be able to describe exactly how the books were inspired, but we can see the results, that the writings reflect the personalities of the various human authors.

1. Humans made in the image of God

One of the first things that the Bible tells us about God and humanity is that God created us "in his image." We read it in the very first chapter, **Genesis 1, verses 26-27:**

Then God said, "**Let us make [humanity] in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.**" ²⁷ **So God created [humanity] in his own image, in the image of God he created [them]; male and female he created them.**

What would an ancient reader think of this idea?

We may get a glimpse of it in Daniel, near the end of the Old Testament. This is about 600 years before the birth of Jesus Christ, and King Nebuchadnezzar was the ruler of the Babylonian Empire. He made a statue about 90 feet high and set it up on a flat plain in the province of Babylon so everyone for miles around could see it, and he commanded everyone to worship it.

Three Jewish men refused to worship it, and they got in trouble with the king. And so Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were thrown into the fiery furnace, and to make a long story short, the fire did not hurt them. The story is in Daniel chapter 3, and it is an interesting story in its own right, but our purpose here is not to look at the three men in the fiery furnace, but to look at that 90-foot statue in the plain of Babylon.

The king set up a statue, and if he was anything like other kings of the ancient Middle East, it was a statue of himself. Nebuchadnezzar's statue was taller than most other statues, but it was certainly not unique in the ancient world. Kings would often set up statues of themselves in the areas that they ruled – this was in the days before coins were minted, and *after* coins were invented,

then rulers found that coins were a much easier way of reminding people of who was in charge. But before that, it was statues of the king.

So whenever one nation conquered another, down would go one statue, and up would go another statue, to show who was in charge of the area. Maybe you remember when Saddam Hussein was overthrown in modern Mesopotamia, then his statue was pulled down and demolished as a visible indicator that his power was gone. There were also lots of billboards with Saddam's face on them, and they ended up getting defaced, in both senses of the word.

When the Soviet Union disintegrated, they similarly had lots of statues and paintings of Lenin and Stalin, and they got removed, too. The city of Leningrad was given back its old name, St. Petersburg, as a public acknowledgement that Lenin's influence was fading away. There were two dimensional images, and three dimensional images, and in the case of city names, verbal images as well, to indicate political power. There are several ways to symbolize the same thing.

In ancient times, they used three-dimensional images – statues that represented the king, or the emperor, and you had better treat that statue with respect. Spitting on the statue would be considered an act of rebellion. And when Nebuchadnezzar wanted people to worship his statue, it was just one step shy of worshipping the king himself. It was his image, and it represented him and his power over the people.

So, when Moses writes in Genesis that people were made in the image of God, this is one thing that the ancient readers would probably think of. An image represents a ruler. God created a three-dimensional image of himself, and we human beings *are* that image. We were all made in the image of God – and we were made to rule, on God's behalf, over all the earth.

In the ancient world, the *image* of a king was a visible representation that the *king* was in charge. When Genesis says that humans are created in the image of God, we should not think that God is giving us complete independence, as if we can rule for our own benefit, by whatever methods we want to. No, when we are said to be in the image of God, we are representing *the real ruler, God*.

God does give us rule over the earth and its creatures. We *are* rulers, but we are not images of ourselves. Rather, our identity must be seen by reference to someone else, someone more powerful than we are. We are images of a ruler who has even more authority than we do – God himself. Some have said that Adam and Eve were vice-regents over all the earth. They were deputies – agents authorized to rule on behalf of the true king, the Creator God.

Both male and female were created in the image of God; they were to work together to represent God's rule over all creation. They represented God, and were to live in a way that reflected their divine origin. Although they were three-dimensional models of God, the real point is not how *big* they are, as if God is only five and a half feet tall, or whether they have five fingers on each hand, or sweat glands, or eyebrows to keep the sweat out of their eyes.

The real point is not their shape, but the kind of life that they have – humans were made to live and behave in such a way that we reflect who God is. As we rule over the birds of the air and the fish of the sea, and anything else, we are to represent God – we are to rule in the way that God himself would. (This has implications for how we take care of the environment, but we do not have time to explore that topic in this lecture.)

2. Humans reject the image

Well, as Genesis tells the story, it didn't take long for the male and the female to mess things up. The serpent suggested that they could declare independence and be rulers unto themselves, and Adam and Eve took the bait and rejected God's rule. They did not want to represent God – they wanted to be gods in their own right. They did not want to live according to someone else's blueprint – they wanted to make their own.

And as Paul says in Romans 1, God let them do it – he let them exchange his glory for something that was ugly and tarnished. He allowed them to become depraved, to worship the creature rather than the Creator. But humans never actually became totally independent – they became slaves to falsehoods, slaves to their own passions, slaves to other people, as the strong tried to oppress the weak. And they invented all sorts of false religions, and became slaves to ideas and spiritual forces that were actually enemies. They acted like images of depravity rather than images of God.

But that did not change God's purpose and plan for them, and it did not change the fact that God still viewed humanity as his representatives on earth. Even after humanity had been thoroughly corrupted by sin, in **Genesis 9:6**, God says:

Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man.

God is saying here that even though humans have gone far astray from what God wants them to do, he still considers them according to his original purpose – that they were made in the image of God. If somebody defaces that image, if someone disrespects that image by killing another human being, then they are showing contempt for the original owner of that image, and that is God himself. The image may not *act* much like God, but that doesn't change the fact that the purpose of that image is that he or she reflect God's rule over his creation.

Surprisingly, that's about all the Old Testament says about the image of God. It has space for all sorts of battles and kings and prophets and miracles, but it doesn't say anything more about the image of God. It's like it was a good idea, but it just didn't go anywhere. Maybe it was like a promise that just seemed so far off that nobody thought it would ever happen.

And in the Old Testament we get a story of what humanity is like when we go our own path, and try to be our own gods. We get stories of chaos, when everyone does what is right in their own eyes (being gods unto themselves), and when brutal dictators arise to try to force everyone else into serving the desires of the dictator. Some might think that people would do better if they just had more laws, and God gave them some laws. And some people might think that society would do better if they had better religious instructions, and God gave them that.

But time and time again, we see that the people rejected what God gave them. They cried out for help, and when the help was given, they soon turned away from it and went back to their own ways of doing things, trying to be their own gods. Exodus shows us a people who promised to obey the God who rescued them, but they fell into idolatry within 40 days. God sent them prophets to remind them of what they were doing, and to remind them that there was a better way to live, but they rejected the prophets. Occasionally a king would arise who might try to restore the nation to obedience, but the king was rarely very successful, and whatever success was achieved did not last very long.

The Old Testament is a story of failure time and time again, and yet God was faithful to the promises he had made to humanity, faithful to the promises he had made to Abraham, and faithful to the promises he made to the nation of Israel. He sent them into captivity, but he also brought them back to the land and they became a people again. He still had a purpose for humanity.

The Old Testament sets the scene for what we read in the New Testament – it tells us who these people are, and the relationship they are supposed to have with God, and the Messiah that was promised to restore the nation to what it was supposed to be.

The Jewish people were looking for a Messiah who was a national leader, a man who would lead the Jewish people into greatness again. But God had something bigger in mind – he was providing a Messiah who would restore not just the nation, but the entire human race, back into the purpose for which God had made them, and that brings us back to “the image of God.” That idea, which lay dormant throughout almost all of the Old Testament, gets revived in the New Testament, and it is given a new and expanded meaning for us today.

3. God becomes his own image

The Gospel of John tells us that the **Word was with God, and the Word was God (John 1:1)**, and this divine Word became a flesh-and-blood human: **He became flesh (1:14)**. He didn't just *clothe* himself with flesh, or put himself *into* a human body – he *became* a real human being. He became the human that Adam and Eve were supposed to be, and part of that includes that he became the image of God.

He became the perfect representative of God, perfect because he was God; he was a human who was perfectly responsive to the Holy Spirit. And as a representative of God, he lived exactly the way God wanted him to, and he showed all of us what God is really like. In **John 14:8**, Philip asked Jesus, **“Show us the Father.”** And Jesus responded, **“Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.”** It's not that God looks like a Jewish carpenter in the land of Judea – Jesus is not concerned about shape or color – he is concerned about the way a person lives. If we have seen the way that Jesus lives, in his attitudes and in his actions, then we have seen what we most need to know about God. When we see the love and compassion of Jesus, then we have seen that God is love and compassion. Jesus shows us what the Father is like.

The New Testament tells us directly that Jesus Christ is the image of God. **Colossians 1:15-16**, talks about Jesus and says, **He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.**

Jesus is great, Paul seems to be saying, because he shows us in a *visible* way what God is like in the invisible, spiritual world. That's because Jesus is the Creator of everything, and as later theologians would say, he is one of the persons of the Godhead. He can show us what God is like because he is fully divine. As **verse 19** says, **“God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him.”** This “image” is not just a representative – he is God in the flesh.

Hebrews 1:3 tells us something similar: **“The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.”** But Jesus is not just a three-dimensional *representation* of God – he is God, existing in our world of space, time, and matter. As **John 1** tells us, **“the Word was with God, and the Word was God, and the Word was made flesh.”** He is God, made flesh, God in three-dimensional form.

When we see Jesus, we see what the Father is like. However, Jesus is not only fully divine, he is also fully human, a real human being. Not only is he a real human being, he is also a *perfect* human being. He shows us what a human being ought to be like, the way that human beings should have been like ever since creation.

This does not mean his physical shape. It doesn't matter how tall he was or what color his hair was, or whether he had any scars from old carpentry accidents. The image of God is not to be seen in the physical form of a person. Rather, Jesus shows us what God is like in terms of his thoughts and his actions.

When Jesus saw a lame man and had compassion on him, that kind of thing helps us see what God is like, and what he wants us to be like. When Jesus came to earth not to do his own will, but the Father's will, that shows us something of what God is, and what we are to do. When Jesus gave his life in order to save us, even when we were his enemies, that shows us what God is like, and that we are also supposed to love our enemies, and be willing to make sacrifices in order to help others. In all these ways, Jesus images

God to us, he is showing us what God is like. But the problem is that humanity didn't like that idea. They did not like the way that God is.

4. Humanity rejects the divine image again

You know this part of the story already: the Jews and the Romans conspired together to kill Jesus. The best religion of the day, and the best judicial system of the day, conspired together to kill a perfectly innocent man. The Jews were looking for a Messiah, a leader sent from God to lead the Jewish nation, but they forgot the fact that God is interested not just in the Jewish people, but in all peoples, and he wants to lead them all, to make them *all* great.

They wanted the Messiah to be an agent of God, to do God's work, but when Jesus came doing the work of God, they didn't recognize it, because they wanted God to do *their* will. The best religion of the time had a pretty distorted idea of what God was like and the way he wanted to work with humanity. If Jesus is like God, they might have said, then they didn't want that sort of God. They decided to get rid of him; they rejected him as an agent and representative of God.

We know what God wants, they said, and this Jesus fellow is not doing it. We know what God looks like, and this fellow doesn't look like it. That's not what we want the Messiah to be, and that's not what we want to be, either. Jesus claims to be like God, but we don't want to look like that. We don't want to be like Jesus.

So they killed him, and as you know, God raised him from the dead. This was justice, correcting a wrong that had been done to an innocent man. This was really good news for Jesus, because Jesus got to live again; he was restored to his place in heaven, full of life and joy.

But it's not just good news for Jesus – it's also good news for us. That's the message of the New Testament. It is good news for us because our destiny is linked to Jesus' destiny; that is one reason that Jesus became a human being, so that he would be not just the representative of God, but also the perfect representative of humanity, and as our perfect representative, he could give God the perfect response that humanity was failing to give.

The apostle Paul tells us that when Jesus died, we died, and when he was raised, we were, too. Jesus joined himself to humanity in such a way that just as he took our sins upon himself, so also we can take his righteousness upon ourselves. This is sometimes called "the great exchange" – he gets our sin, and perfectly cleanses it, and we are clothed in his righteousness, and the rewards that come with it. We are saved by grace, by Jesus, not by anything we can do.

But this is not just a change in terminology, that we are called righteous even though we are not. No, God is a Creator, and he is *creating in us* what we are supposed to be. He is creating that righteousness within us. He is still working on that image.

5. Restoring the image

Paul tells us that we are supposed to become more like Jesus. **2 Corinthians 3:18** tells us, "**And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.**"

We are being transformed to be more like Jesus – we are being changed – and this is not from yourselves, Paul might say, it is the gift of God. We can't just do this on our own. It has to be *him living in us*, changing our hearts, changing us from the inside out, to be, in the innermost recesses of our hearts, more like who he is. Just as God breathed life into the old Adam and Eve, so also he breathes new life into his people. He gives us the Holy Spirit to change us from the inside out.

How does this work? One way it seems to work is that the Holy Spirit joins the conversation in our brains, as we think about what it is that we are going to do. One thought says, Get as much as you can for yourself. Another thought says, It's better to give than to take. Where did that thought come from? It came from God in us, whether we are aware of that fact or not. Our job is to say yes to the God thought, and no to the selfish thought.

The conversation in our brain may go a step further. One thought says, I did the right thing. I hope somebody notices what a good person I am. And another thought says, If it was up to me, I would have done the wrong thing. So whatever good that I did, the credit should go to the Holy Spirit in me, and if anybody notices, I hope that they give God the credit. Then we need to figure out which is the godly thought, and which is the selfish thought, and we need to go with the godly thought.

This is a bit like what Paul describes in **Colossians 3, verses 8 through 10**:

But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. ⁹Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices ¹⁰and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.

There's the terminology of "image" again. Being made in the image of God, and being transformed into the image of Christ, is not a completely passive process in which God does all the work for us. No, we have a role in it, too, and the "image of God" has practical implications for the way we live and what we do, and what we live for. Through knowledge of what is right and what is wrong, we are in a process of getting rid of the wrong, and putting on the new self. This new self, says Paul, is being renewed in the image of our Creator – bit by bit, we are being transformed into the image of Christ.

Sometimes it seems like we are not making any progress. That's because Jesus keeps getting all the credit and we keep getting all the blame. Whenever we did it, it was wrong, and we don't seem to make much progress on that side of the balance sheet. "We" are just as bad as we were before.

But the transformation comes in that “we” operate on our own less and less, and we stop worrying about the scorecard and who is getting the credit, and we simply trust God to do his job in us whether or not we can see the results. He is transforming us to be more like he is, whether we see it or not.

Be of good cheer, Jesus seems to say. Your sins are forgiven – every one of them. Don’t be paralyzed by your sins – just get up and move forward. **Romans 8:1 tells us that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.** He is on our side, and if God himself is for us, who can be against us? No one.

Whatever it is that we have to give up, Jesus says he will replace it with something 100 times better. And usually, whenever we give something up, it doesn’t take us very long to figure out that the old stuff really wasn’t worth much anyway. We are clinging on to rags, when Jesus wants to give us robes of royalty. He wants to make us more like he is, to transform us into the image that we were originally meant to be.

In **Galatians 4:19**, Paul said that he was working for the believers in Galatia “**until Christ is formed in you.**” That’s the goal that he wanted to see, that the people would become more like Christ.

In **Ephesians 4**, he says that this is the purpose of leaders in the church. In **verse 11** he says that God appoints leaders: “**It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers...**” In **verses 12 and 13** he explains their purpose: “**to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up¹³until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.**” That’s what maturity is like, that’s the end goal of the process, that we attain the whole measure of the fullness of Christ – that we are transformed into his image, the image of God.

Basically, when we are in a right relationship with God, we grow in our knowledge of what is right, and that changes our relationships with other people. We are treating other people in better ways, we are making good on our commitments, we care more about other people.

2 Peter 1:3-4 also describes the transformation we are involved in: **His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. ⁴Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.**

Yes, we participate in the divine nature. This is what the early church leaders called *theosis*, or deification. Athanasius, the fourth-century bishop of Alexandria, in North Africa, said that Jesus became what we are, so that we might become what he is. He said that God became human, so that humans might become god. He apologized for the boldness of the formula, saying, “We are as God by *imitation*, not by nature.” “We cannot become like God *in essence*,” in our fundamental being, but he says that “*by progress in virtue* we can imitate God.” We participate in the divine nature by becoming more like him in virtue, in morality, in our ethics, in the way we live and the way we think.

6. A new picture: life with God

Now, we are in a process of being changed in the inner person, in our thoughts and attitudes and behavior. But a time is coming when we will be transformed into God’s image in additional ways, too. Our very nature will be changed, and we will share in the glory of Jesus Christ. At the resurrection, we will be *in the likeness of his resurrection*.

In **1 Corinthians 15**, Paul describes the resurrection, and he says in **verse 49**, “**just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.**” We will have the image of Christ in a more glorious way.[1] If we are like him in this life, we will be like him in the next life, too.

1 John 3:1-2 gives us a similar picture: **How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.²Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.**

We will be like he is; we will be even more fully made in his image. All humanity has been created in the image of God, made for this very purpose. We are already his children, already “in his image” in one sense, but there is more to come. As we are transformed into his image in this life in the way we live and think, we will be transformed more completely into his image when we are resurrected into glory and given immortality and incorruptibility. This is the glorious future God has prepared for us.

And so what conclusion does John draw from this wonderful promise? **Verse 3: “Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.”** When we want to be like God is, then we want to be like him in morals and behavior. It’s the same package, the glory that God has designed for us.

You see, there’s a lot more to eternal life than just living forever. A never-ending life of misery would be no good, and that is not what God wants us to have. Rather, he wants us to have a never-ending life of joy, of good relationships, of life not just with God, but life and relationships with millions and billions of other people who help one another and love one another.

The Greek word for “eternal” is *aiōnios*; it is related to the word for “age.” Eternal life is actually “age life,” meaning life that is characteristic of “the age to come.” That kind of life will indeed last forever, but the stress is about quality, not quantity. It’s about

how *good* it is, not how long it is. John 6:47 says that people who believe in Jesus already have eternal life. We already have life that is like the age to come. We don't have it completely, but it does start now. We live the way of the future, even now.

But in what way is our life now like life in the age to come? How can our vision of future life affect the way we live now? Here's another thought that many Christians struggle with: If God is going to *give* us everything by grace, why should we bother with the difficult work of saying no to our own fleshly desires? If Jesus has already paid for all our sins, and God has already forgiven all our sins, and if there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, why should we struggle? Why not get as much enjoyment as we can, and enjoy the next life, too? Why not steal and use violence to force other people to do our will, if we are going to be saved by God's grace, anyway?

If salvation is by grace, why does the New Testament have so many commands about what we are supposed to do? Is it grace on how we get in, but works after we get in? No, not at all. It is because God is not just graciously giving us a life that lasts forever – he is giving us a life of a certain quality, life that is based on love rather than selfishness and competition. When the New Testament gives us commands, it is describing for us the kind of life that God is giving us, the life of the age to come. Grace says: I am giving you a never-ending life of joy. The commands say: This is what it looks like.

If selfishness is the kind of life we *like*, then we are not going to enjoy the kingdom of God very much, because his way of life is based on giving to other people rather than being selfish. God is offering us life in his kingdom, offering us life that will be like *his* life, life that is based on love and generosity, rather than selfishness. That's the way that produces no more sorrow and no more pain. In a metaphor, a parable, we might say that God is standing at the gateway to his kingdom, and he invites us in. You are welcome to come in, he says, where there is no more pain or sorrow or lying or cheating or selfishness. And some people will say, I would like to have the "no more pain" part, but can't I keep my selfishness? And God says, "No, they are two sides of the same coin. Your selfishness is the cause of pain. If you walk through this gate, I will remove all the selfishness from you, so that you don't cause pain for anyone else." And some people will be so in love with their selfishness that they will refuse to go in; they cannot imagine life based on anything but selfishness.

If we want to live in a world in which no one treats us badly, and if those people are *also* enjoying a world in which no one treats them badly, then that means that we are not treating anyone badly. If we want the results of love, then we need to have a life of love.

If we want that kind of life for all eternity, if we really want that kind of life, then we will want it now. We will want to live the way that life will be lived in the future age; we will want to be like God is then, and we will want to be like God is now; we will want to be his representatives, living and breathing images of God. That is why the New Testament tells us not only about the grace of God, but also gives us instructions about how we should live. Even in times of persecution, at the threat of death, we want to be true to the life of the age to come so much that we are willing to let go of physical life, the life of the present evil age. Of course it is not our "goodness" that makes such a choice – it is the goodness of God living in us.

As images of God, we want our life to be characteristic of the age to come, characteristic of the life that God himself has. We are images of God and representatives of God, and we should want to live in the way that he does. This life is representative of God himself, a fulfillment of the image that we are supposed to be. And in the age to come, we will forever be images of God, children of God, completely and perfectly.

[1]Perhaps not physically, but rather in the more important aspects of the way we live. But physics itself will be changed, and we are probably unable to understand what it will be like, and the Bible is using metaphors to convey the thought.



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