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#SS09

GOD'S PRESENT PURPOSE

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It is the faith of all who believe in God that the day will surely come when He will put forth all His wisdom and power to insure the triumph of good and the defeat of evil. There is great diversity of opinion among the followers of Jesus Christ as to how and when this will be done, but if they have ever thought upon this matter they agree that there is a destined limit to the reign of evil in this world. They do not believe that God will permit the present condition of things to go on forever. The hour will yet come when the Almighty God will do the thing that all God-fearing men believe He can do, should do, and will do.

It hardly needs to be said that it is not at all strange that God will some day put forth His power to bring about the victory of good. It is what you would do if you were God. It is what I would do if I were God. It is no mystery at all that He will do this. **THE GREAT MYSTERY IS THAT HE DELAYS SO LONG.** For if we judge by all that we see around us, God would seem to be an indifferent spectator of the unequal struggle between good and evil upon the earth. In view of this there are many today who find their feelings concerning this expressed in the words of Solomon:

I considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun: and behold the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter: and on the side of their oppressors there was power: but they had no comforter. Ecclesiastes 4:1.

It is only reasonable that thinking men should seek for some explanation of the seeming indifference of God in the great conflict between good and evil, truth and error. If the God of heaven be all-powerful; all-wise, and all-good, how can it be that darkness and error, vice and godlessness are rampant on every side and yet He do nothing about it ?

Of course there are many unthinking Christians, blissful in their own ignorance who believe that God is doing something about it. They will point to the religious activity that is seen on every hand, to certain blessings which they believe God has given to certain individuals or groups, or they will point to instances of answered prayer in which God is supposed to have intervened in behalf of certain men. Nevertheless, the

fact is as plain to the honest observer as is the noonday sun, that all God has done for individuals in the past 2000 years has been as ineffectual in stopping the flood of iniquity as handfuls of sand would be in checking the flow of Niagara.

All men who believe in God will readily admit that there is infinitely more that God can do about the present state of things upon the earth than what He is doing now. Put the question to them and they would not dare to deny it. He has not exhausted His resources. There is infinitely more that He could do. For example, He could speak the word, decreeing that there shall be light, and thus enlighten mankind in respect to that which is sin in His sight and that which is right before His eyes. He could make it plain to all exactly what is meant by the things said in His word. He could say to individual men, "This is the way, walk ye in it." If He did these things it would end the moral, religious, and spiritual confusion which exists on every hand. He could remove from the eyes of men the veil that is there in regard to the person and work of Jesus Christ. He could richly and abundantly bless the efforts of all who seek to do good, and He could effectively hinder the efforts of all who seek to do evil. These are only a few of the things which He could do. And if He did them, this world would be a vastly different place in just thirty days.

Those who believe the Bible can point to numerous incidents in times past where God intervened and injected Himself into the affairs of men and nations. He spoke, His voice was heard, His form was seen, He gave light, He showed men how He would have them walk, He openly fought on the side of good, and He just as openly fought against the forces of evil. But in contrast with all this, heaven has now been silent for twenty long centuries. The One who in many parts and in many ways spoke in time past unto the fathers by the prophets (Hebrews 1:1) does not now speak to His people at all. As Sir Robert Anderson has said:

The Divine history of the favored race for thousands of years teems with miracles by which God gave proof of His power with men, and yet we are confronted by the astounding fact that from the days of the apostles to the present hour the history of Christendom will be searched in vain for the record of a single public event to compel belief that there is a God at all. (*The Silence of God*, page 18).

In view of these facts there are those who hold that God has seen fit to withdraw from the affairs of men and nations and to leave them absolutely to themselves. But the witness of the Word of God makes such a belief impossible. The Bible reveals that God is actively interested in the affairs of men, that He is doing for mankind a glorious work which operates in secret, and it shows that the mystery of His present silence is explained by HIS PRESENT PURPOSE.

It is an essential truth of divine revelation that the day will come when God will openly intervene and fully inject Himself into the affairs of men and nations. To all who pray, "Thy kingdom come," we can say that the kingdom is coming. The day is

coming when God's government is going to be a reality upon this earth. A host of passages could be cited which have a bearing upon this. Due to limitations of space, two will suffice for this study.

In the prophecy of Ezekiel, the Lord has declared concerning the people of Israel:

As I live, saith the Lord God, surely with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out, will I rule over you: And I will bring you out from the peoples, and will gather you out of the countries wherein ye are scattered, with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm. and with fury poured out. And I will bring you into the wilderness of the people, and there will I plead with you face to face. Like as I pleaded with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt. so will I plead with you. saith the Lord God. And I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant: And I will purge out front among you the rebels, and them that transgress against Me: I will bring them forth out of the country where they sojourn, and they shall not enter into the land of Israel: and ye shall know that I am the Lord. Ezekiel 20:33-38.

In this passage God speaks of intervening in the affairs of the people of Israel, dealing with them both as a nation and as individuals, bringing in His government upon them. As one reads these words he cannot help but think what a difference it would make in Israel if God would only do the thing He has said He is going to do. Even if He moved only in behalf of Israel, the rest of the nations could benefit from the light that He gives to them. But it is not only on behalf of Israel that God intends to move. In one of the prophetic Psalms it is declared of the earth and the nations of the earth:

Come, behold the works of the Lord, what desolations (astonishing things) He hath made in the earth. He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth: He breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder: He burneth the chariot in the fire. Be still (desist) and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen (nations), I will be exalted in the earth. Psalm 48:9-10.

The things set forth in the two passages quoted above will be true of the nation of Israel and of the nations of the earth in the day when God brings forth His wisdom and power to insure the victory of good and the defeat of evil. These prophecies will be fulfilled in the day when God imposes His government upon the men and the nations of the earth. These things wait upon the coming of the kingdom of God, for His kingdom is nothing more or nothing less than His government. His long delay in fulfilling prophecies such as these, and the mystery of His present silence can only be understood when we know GOD'S PRESENT PURPOSE. A knowledge of this purpose can be found only in the sacred Scriptures.

The testimony of the Word of God reveals that there was a time in history when God publicly moved and acted to replace human government with heavens' government, to replace the reign of sin and death with a reign of righteousness and life. This was seen when John the Baptist appeared in Israel saying: **Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Matthew 3:2.**

If the original language of this clarion call is more faithfully translated it will read:
Submit, for the government of the heavens has drawn near.

But even if we allow the familiar version to stand, the only meaning these words can possibly bear is that the time had drawn near when the heavens would govern the earth. In Biblical usage the word *heavens* can mean beings as well as places. The singular is used as a designation for God in Luke 15: 18 and in Luke 20:4. Since God is "the Highest of the heavens" the government of the heavens which John heralded is also God's government. John warned that the time would come when this government would act like God's government should. The axe was to be laid to the root of the trees; every tree that failed to produce good fruit was to be cut down and burned; a great separation and purging was to take place with the wheat being gathered into the granary and the chaff being burned with unquenchable fire. See Matthew 3: 10-12. The record leaves no doubt but that "the Judge of all the earth" was moving to impose His government upon the earth, beginning in Israel first. For while it is true that the ministry of John had only *to* do with the people of Israel, the Scriptures make it plain that God's government was to be unlimited in its scope.

Behold My servant, whom I have chosen: My beloved in whom My soul is well pleased: I will put My spirit upon Him, and He shall show judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not strive, nor cry: neither shall any man hear His voice in the streets. A bruised reed shall He not break, and smoking flax shall He not quench, till He send forth judgment unto victory. And in His name shall the Gentiles trust. Matthew 12:18-21.

From these words we learn about the methods of the One upon whose shoulder the government of God is to rest. He will not strive, nor cry, neither will anyone hear His voice in the streets. Such things as these are always present when one human government overthrows another. A great show of ruthless force is considered desirable at such times. But the Lord Jesus, in establishing His government would not even break the bruised reed or quench the smoking flax. Wrath is always the last resort of power, and wrath will be His last resort, not the first. He declared: **So is the kingdom (government) of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground: and should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth no. how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself: first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle for the harvest is come. Mark 4:26-29.**

These words reveal the manner in which God will put forth His wisdom and power to bring about the defeat of evil, the victory of good, and the full establishment of His government in the earth. This is declared to be in stages comparable to the blade, the ear, the full grain in the ear, the ripened grain, and the harvest stages of growing grain. And the beginning of all this divine activity was not to be long delayed. The Lord's further word to His disciples was:

Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom (government) of God come with power. Mark 9:1.

True, not all of them would live to see it, for Judas would die by his own hand, but eleven of them would live until they had seen God's government come in power.

All that was needed to make God's long promised government a reality, the only events needed to transpire were the death, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ. His throne, the seat of His government, had been prepared in the heavens, and it was from there that He was to rule over all. Psalm 103:19. It was while He was in the heavens that His enemies were to **"become subject to Him.** Hebrews 1:13. Throughout His entire ministry the Lord Jesus spoke of His death, His resurrection, and of His return to the place and state from whence He came. He spoke of the great triumphs that were to follow His ascension to the right hand of power, triumphs so incredible that His own disciples could hardly believe them. Yes, they were to see the Son of man coming in His government. They were to see the government of God coming in power.

The great event that took place ten days after the ascension of the Lord Jesus to "the right hand of the power of God" was enough to show that the divine processes had begun which in due time would fully establish God's government in the earth. On that memorable day of Pentecost God worked openly. A hundred and twenty disciples became publicly identified with the Spirit of God. By means of a gift of languages the curse of Babel was lifted from every one of them. The events that took place in the days that followed the ascension of Jesus Christ caused the heart of every believer to leap for joy. At last the great processes had begun which would bring about the triumph of good and the defeat of evil. They may have begun only in a small way with only a hundred and twenty, but they would move on inexorably. He would not fail nor be discouraged until He had set judgment in the earth. See Isaiah 42: 1-4.

The first public message given after the ascension of Jesus Christ caused the number of believers to increase to three thousand one hundred and twenty. Following this an open, undeniable miracle of healing took place at one of the temple gates, and the

message delivered to the crowd that assembled caused the number of believers to increase to five thousand. And when this public miracle caused the apostles to be threatened with dire penalties if they spoke in the name of Jesus of Nazareth again, they appealed from men to God. Then and there God gave public proof that He heard their prayer, and that their witness should continue. See Acts 4.

When Ananias and Sapphira sinned, sudden punishment came upon them in such manner as to show that God would not tolerate sin among any who had come under the benefits of His government. See Acts 5.

Lack of space makes it impossible to recount all the signs and wonders, the miracles of healing, resurrections from the dead, angelic visitations, and prison deliverances that took place in the thirty-three years of which the book of Acts is the history. Divine intervention was no mystic theory during that time. It was not something which men claimed in order to aggrandize themselves. God intervened in manifest ways in order to further the purpose on which He was then working. This purpose was His kingdom purpose. It was His purpose to bring His government into the world.

There can be no question but that in the Acts period the foundation was being laid for the next great stage of God's government. That which the Lord had planted was to advance from the "blade" stage to "the ear" and "the full grain in *the* ear." The out-called company which was to serve Him in His government was about complete. And even though persecutions became rampant, this did not discourage the out-called ones for they had been warned in advance to expect this in the "night period" of the kingdom. But this night period had run its course and the "day period" was at hand. This led the Apostle Paul to declare:

And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. THE NIGHT IS FAR SPENT, THE DAY IS AT HAND: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Romans 13:11, 12.

But "the day" never came. God's kingdom never progressed beyond the "blade" stage of the Acts period, and even that blessed stage is no longer seen. The heaven became silent, and ever since the close of the Acts period this silence has remained unbroken. For twenty centuries the world has not witnessed a public manifestation of His presence or His power. There can be no question but that something happened. God's great purpose to bring in His kingdom, His declared purpose to rule over Israel, His purpose to govern the world have all been suspended. And there is no possible way to account for this suspension but to recognize God's PRESENT PURPOSE. That which He is now doing, the purpose on which He is now working is of sufficient importance to justify this suspension and His long delay in bringing His government into the world. He has preserved His silence for twenty centuries because this is essential to

His present purpose. The moment that He breaks His silence and acts or speaks in a manifest manner, it will be the signal that His present purpose is complete and that a new dispensation has begun.

The Kingdom Suspended

The truth which has already been set forth is sufficient to show that God's kingdom purposes were suspended at the end of the thirty-three year period of which the book of Acts is the history. His purpose to govern and to bless Israel and the world was not suspended at the Cross. The Cross was a vital part of this program and it could not have caused its suspension. God is seen actively engaged in this purpose throughout the entire Acts period. See Acts 3: 25, 26 and Acts 28: 20. All that God did in the Acts period was vitally related to His kingdom purposes. The **ecclesia** (church) that was being called out was the ecclesia of the kingdom. See Matthew 16:18,19. To these the very keys of the kingdom were given. And even the message of grace that was given to the Apostle Paul was for the purpose of giving a place under God's government to men who otherwise would have been excluded from it. A reading of I Corinthians 6:1-11 will show that these converts of Paul had through his message of grace been given a place from which their sins would have barred them. And it will also show that they were destined to be a part of God's government in its next stage on the earth. Furthermore, Paul's declaration in I Thessalonians 2:12 (an Acts period epistle) can mean only one thing. These believers had been called in relationship to the government (kingdom) of God.

If we expect to comprehend God's present purpose it is essential that we make a clear distinction between the purpose for which the gospel of grace was heralded in the Acts period and the purpose for which it is heralded now. Failure to do this will result in wrong division of the word of Truth.

The simple event which marks the suspension of God's kingdom purposes is the pronouncement of Paul in **Acts 28: 28**.

Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it.

It was at this point that God withdrew the gift of languages (tongues); a gift which effectively lifted the curse of Babel for all who possessed it. It was here that God withdrew from his ambassadors the power to instantly, miraculously, and uniformly heal, a power that had done much to relieve one of the results of Adam's sin. Yes, it was at Acts 28: 28 that God withdrew all the powers that He had granted to men in relationship to His kingdom purposes. All this sums up into one great truth. **GOD IS NOT NOW CONCERNED WITH HIS KINGDOM PURPOSES.** He is not now bringing forth His wisdom and power to insure the victory of good and the defeat of

evil. All divine activities related to His kingdom purposes are suspended while He works out and completes another purpose. Again it needs to be said for the sake of emphasis, this suspension took place at the end of the thirty-three year period *covered* by the book of Acts. The fact that Paul continued to preach the kingdom of God during the two years of his residence in Rome (Acts 28: 31) does not deny this in the least: There was nothing about the suspension of the kingdom that required that men of God should seal their lips concerning it. It is still preached today by all men who give a complete witness to the Word of God.

Explanations Considered

Before we consider God's present purpose, before we give thought to what He is now doing, it will be necessary for us to clear the ground by reviewing certain ideas, which are put forth in hope of explaining God's long delay in putting forth His power to deal with the evils that are seen on every hand.

There are many who hold ideas which when analyzed appear to teach that God was defeated in His purpose to bring in the kingdom of the heavens due to Israel's failure to cooperate. They infer that Israel's rejection of Christ forced a change of plans upon Him, and that His hands are tied until such time as Israel softens her harsh judgment toward Him. The mere statement of these ideas is sufficient answer to them. When John announced the nearness of the kingdom of the heavens as recorded in Matthew 3, it was not in any manner linked up with Israel's acceptance or rejection of it. The kingdom was proclaimed, not offered to be accepted or rejected. Submission would give any Israelite a place in the kingdom, and resistance would bring about his purging from it, but the kingdom was in no manner related to the Israelite's attitude toward it. If we read again Ezekiel 20: 33-44 we will see how illogical it is to hold that God's declaration that He would rule over them could in any manner be affected by their acceptance or rejection of Him as their ruler. All through this passage God makes it plain that it matters not what they want or what they do, to rule over them is what He is going to do. There was nothing about the unbelief of Israel at the close of the Acts period that led to the suspension of God's kingdom purposes. This suspension would have taken place even if every man, woman, and child in Israel had received the Lord. The suspension had to be so that God could work out and complete another purpose, and it was not forced upon God by Israel's unbelief.

God's long delay in bringing forth His power to insure the defeat of evil and the victory of good is explained by many to be for the purpose of allowing Him time "to pluck brands out of the burning." Those who hold this idea seem to visualize the world of men as being carried on to destruction and God permitting this so that He can snatch a few from the mass and thus be glorified as their deliverer. This is both illogical and unreasonable. It charges God with permitting a condition just so He can save some from that condition. Why should God be satisfied to pluck a few brands from the burning when it is well within His power to put out the fire? It cannot be that

God allows the long reign of evil to continue so that He can save a few out of it when He could just as well bring to an end the situation that causes the loss of multitudes.

Some believe that God keeps the human race in its present condition so that He can use the earth as a recruiting ground for heaven. But if this is so then the great number lost so far outweighs the small number gained that God would not be just in carrying on any such program. Furthermore, this does not explain His present silence. If He seeks to recruit men for His army, why has He withdrawn the public proofs of His power and compassion? In the Acts period His people had public proof of these. Why is He now so silent?

It is often said that God's present purpose is "**to take out from among the Gentiles a people for His name.**" Acts 15: 14 is pointed to in support of this. His preoccupation with this out-calling from the Gentiles is put forth as an explanation as to why He does nothing about the world as a whole. But it must be remembered that this taking a people from among the Gentiles was what God was doing in the Acts period in connection with His kingdom purposes. And to make this work effective every manner of miracle, mighty work, sign, and wonder was done among the Gentiles by the Apostle Paul in order to make them obedient. Romans 15: 18,19.

If this work among the Gentiles continues right down to this day, if this is God's present purpose, then why have such effective aids been withdrawn from those who proclaim Christ to the Gentiles? Since the close of the book of Acts down to the present hour there has not been one single public *event* of the nature of the things done by Paul "to, make the Gentiles obedient." In view of this, if God's present purpose were not known, we would be forced to cry out with Gideon of old:

If the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all His miracles which our fathers told us of. Judges 6:13.

One other idea needs yet to be considered. There are those who say that God's present purpose is to call out "the church" and that all blessings for Israel, the nation, and the earth must await the completion of this special company. Some call this special work "the body of Christ." However it does not seem to be the teaching of Scripture that God has delayed His avowed purpose to establish justice and judgment in the earth so that out of each generation He can call a few who are to be specially blessed in a special way as "the church, the body of Christ."

This idea may feed the ego of many who claim to be a part of this calling, but it is not an adequate explanation of God's long delay in bringing an end to the reign of sin and death. True, God does have a unique and distinct calling of believers today, and it is also true that they are to be blessed in a special manner and that they are to serve

Him in a special way, but to call and produce this company is not God's present purpose. God's present calling of believers in Jesus Christ is a by-product of His purpose. It is not the purpose itself. His present purpose is so great that it centers in Himself, His Name, His Character. It does not center in men, not even in saved men.

Grace and Government

At this point it will be most helpful in the pursuit of our theme if we note that **the polarity of God's character** is expressed in the two words **GRACE** and **GOVERNMENT**. These two words express in full the character of God as revealed in Jesus Christ, and they sum up all that He ever has been or ever will be to His creatures. The One who is the God of all (every) grace (1 Peter 5: 10) is also the Judge of all the earth (Genesis 18: 25) . If God is not recognized as being **both** the God of grace and the God of government, then we do not know the One who is expressed, revealed, and declared in Jesus Christ. If men argue that because of the great love of God no man will ever be punished, then they are ignoring one pole of God's character. They are emphasizing the God of grace and ignoring the God of government. In God's grace we see His perfect love, but in His government we see His perfect justice. Men dealt with in grace receive what they do not deserve, but men dealt with under government receive exactly what they deserve, neither more nor less.

Mankind is yet going to see a complete and open demonstration of the government of God. Its power and principles, its morals and methods, its justice and judgments, its light and life, its healing and health, its benefits and blessings are all going to be seen in manifest operation. Men in that day will be able to make a full comparison between human rule and heavens' rule, between man's government and God's government. The world is yet to see an administration of divine government.

This is what the world would have seen and experienced if God had continued His kingdom purposes at the close of the Acts period. The foundation was laid in that period for the full revelation of God's righteous government. But, as has already been said this was suspended in order to fulfill another purpose, a purpose that had ever been a secret known only to God.

GOD'S PRESENT PURPOSE IS TO DEMONSTRATE HIS GRACE. He is providing within the history of mankind a demonstration of the graciousness of His character. This He is now doing by means of a dispensation or administration of grace, under which all His government or kingdom purposes are in abeyance.

The explanation of God's long toleration of evil, His present silence, His delay in bringing His government into the world can be satisfactorily explained only when we realize that God is fulfilling another purpose which is centered in His own character. In order that all men who come to know Him can know that He is the God of every

grace, He is now accomplishing a demonstration of His grace which will stand through all eternity. This demonstration of His grace will still be on record when sin and death have been abolished and when grace can no longer be shown to man. God is now taking every step that is necessary to forever establish beyond all question that He is the God of every grace. This is what He is now doing. This is His present purpose.

The truth that God's present purpose is to demonstrate the graciousness of His character may seem like an oversimplification to many. In fact, it is so simple that some may reject it without further consideration. However, when we seek to trace out the truth expressed in this concise statement in search of further details it becomes so vast that only the genuine truth lover will have the heart to follow it out to all its conclusions. In fact this one truth might well be called the "Mount Everest" of all the truths that are unique to this present time. Many other heights must be scaled before one can even set foot on this mountain and be in position for the final ascent. Therefore, in the hope of offering all help possible, we will consider this truth by means of a series of related propositions.

1. IT IS ENTIRELY HARMONIOUS WITH THE WAYS OF GOD THAT HE SHOULD DO THAT WHICH WILL PROVIDE A DEMONSTRATION OF THE GRACIOUSNESS OF HIS CHARACTER.

Our God desires that men shall know Him in truth. To know Him should be the chief aim of man. God has in times past done many things to correct the misconceptions that men have held concerning Him. He has declared that He will do certain things in the future to the end that men might know Him. This is seen in those things which He has said He will do in which the supreme motive is declared to be for the sake of His own name. God's name is His character, it is what He is. This is a fact easily established from Scripture. When He proclaimed His name, He proclaimed His character. See Exodus 34:5-7. There were times in God's dealings with Israel when His name was so profaned, His character was so misrepresented, that He declared He would do certain things for His "holy name's sake." Read carefully Ezekiel 36: 16-38 for a complete record of this. In this portion we find that God will not do this great work in behalf of Israel in order that Israel might be blessed, even though Israel will be richly blessed by it. Their blessing will be the by-product of what He will do for the sake of His own name. **"I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for mine holy name's sake, which ye have profaned among the nations."** This is Jehovah's emphatic statement.

Since He will do all this work for Israel in order to demonstrate His faithfulness and righteousness, it is not strange at all that He should now be taking steps which will provide everlasting proof of the graciousness of His character. In spite of the oft repeated declarations that He is the God of every grace, men have never held this

estimate of Him. Therefore, what He declared in time past concerning Himself, He is now demonstrating. What He is now demonstrating will in the future be put on display. The time will come when all men who live under God will learn of His grace by carefully considering the history of the grace which He is showing now.

2. MANKIND WILL BE INFINITELY RICHER IN DIVINE KNOWLEDGE BECAUSE OF THIS DEMONSTRATION OF GOD'S GRACE.

Man's quest for knowledge is never ending. No price is considered too great to pay for one scientific fact. At enormous cost entailing great suffering men have gone to the poles, climbed the highest mountains, descended into the depths of the sea, and excavated ancient cities in the hope of increasing human knowledge. The knowledge of God has not been so sought after. But all that man can ever learn about God's creation will not be a drop in the ocean compared to what he can learn about the graciousness of the Creator when this great demonstration of His grace is complete and its facts are made available to mankind. God's demonstration of grace is taking place now. The understanding and appreciation of it belongs to the future.

3. GOD'S GREAT DEMONSTRATION OF GRACE IS BY MEANS OF AN ADMINISTRATION OF GRACE.

In Ephesians 3: 2 we read of "the dispensation of the grace of God." The Greek word translated "dispensation" here means literally an administration. In fact **a dispensation is not a period of time. It is an administration.** And to extend this still further, **an administration is a method of dealing.** This passage tells us that God's present method of dealing with the human race is on the basis of free, unmerited, unearned favor. This makes the present time unique above all times past and all times future. No matter how much grace God has shown in previous times, there has never before been an administration of grace. God has consistently manifested Himself in acts of grace in the past, but never has there been an extended time in which God has limited Himself to deal with mankind in grace and nothing but grace. **Under this administration of grace, if God cannot act in grace then He will not act at all.** The time is coming when because of the absolute justice and righteousness of His government, God's dealings with men may at times be extremely severe. Under His government every sin and transgression will receive its just recompense of reward. But no matter how severe God may be in the future, the fact of the graciousness of His character will have been demonstrated in the grace He is now showing.

4. GRACE AND GOVERNMENT ARE SUCH WHOLLY DIFFERENT PRINCIPLES THAT BOTH CANNOT BE IN OPERATION AT THE SAME TIME.

Let no one arbitrarily reject this statement until he knows what is meant by it. The reader may object to this proposition on the basis that at the time of the flood Noah "found grace in the eyes of the Lord". while in regard to the rest of mankind God acted in justice bringing in "the flood upon the world of the ungodly," This is true, but

it must be carefully noted that when God dealt with Noah in grace, He was not dealing with him in justice, and as He dealt with the world in justice, He was not dealing with it in grace. Under grace God shows love and favor to the undeserving, while under government He gives men exactly what they deserve, neither more nor less. God cannot act at the same time upon two wholly different and incompatible principles. Furthermore, it must be clearly understood that the time preceding the flood was neither an administration of grace nor of government. God had not committed Himself to either method of dealing. Thus grace and government can operate and did operate in the same *era* but not in regard to the same people.

Or the reader may point to the fact that there was both the grace of God and the government of God at work in the Acts period. This is as true as anything can be true. The men who lived in that time saw more divine activities related to God's government than had ever been witnessed before, and God's activities in grace were greater than ever seen before. Never before had a message of grace been heralded to men. In fact grace dominated the Acts period. But it is also true that grace and government never acted to do the same thing at the same time. When every fact *of* the Acts period is examined, grace is seen to be only in part and government is seen to be only in part. The grace displayed made a full display of government impossible and the government that was acting made a full display of grace impossible.

God's present administration is one of pure grace. He has declared this through His chosen servant Paul, and we will do well to take Him at His word and think accordingly. Not once since the close of the Acts period has He dealt with any man in justice. His acts and works toward men have been acts of love and favor to the undeserving. When God's purpose in this administration is complete, the world will experience an administration of pure government. Under this coming administration men will be required to give an account of every idle word they speak. Nevertheless, there will be mercy under God's government. A government can righteously show mercy, *if mercy is deserved*, but no government can be just and show favor to the undeserving. A government will break down and rulers will deal unjustly the moment an attempt is made to be gracious. As an example of this we might consider the fact that at times there have been riots among prisoners in which the officials were forced to show the convicts favors that they did not deserve. All must admit that this grace was shown at the expense of justice.

If God's present administration is one of grace, and Paul in Ephesians 3:2 proclaims that it is, then it cannot be an administration of divine government even in part. God's present method of dealing with the human race is entirely gracious. To insist that God is doing anything else but acting in grace in this dispensation is to deny the purpose on which He is now working.

5. GOD HAS ALWAYS SHOWN GRACE TO MEN, BUT AT THE PRESENT TIME MANKIND IS BEING SHOWN THE EXCEEDING RICHES OF HIS GRACE.

This is a truth revealed in the last epistles written by the Apostle Paul, and it is a truth which can be seen only by the eye of faith. If we try to prove this by what we see on every hand it cannot be done. But if we go to the Word of God it is taught there. The translators seem almost to have vied with one another as they sought to express the truth of Ephesians 2:7. Surpassing riches, amazing riches, incomparable wealth, boundless wealth! These are the terms which they use in translating the original language of this passage, a passage which tells of the grace that God is now showing to mankind. Never before in all history has God lavished His grace upon mankind as He is doing now. His present display of grace surpasses anything He has ever done before. In the Acts period the grace displayed was of benefit only to those who believed. But the grace that God is now showing is a benefit to every member of the human race. Today there are special blessings for those who believe, such as forgiveness, redemption and justification, but there is no man upon earth who is not blessed because of the grace of God. Those who believe in Jesus Christ become the trophies of the grace that God is now displaying. Among the eons to come they will display and extol the grace that was shown to man in this the administration of the grace of God.

6. THE GRACE WHICH GOD IS NOW SHOWING TO MEN IS UNTRACEABLE.

This is the testimony of Ephesians 3: 8, where the word "unsearchable" could be better translated "**untraceable**." It is impossible for anyone today to put His finger upon the thing which God is doing. God's word declares it, and men of faith will take Him at His word and think accordingly, but if men demand that we show how the grace of God is of benefit to some wretched individual, we cannot do so. Furthermore, the grace that God is showing today does not concern the individual. It concerns mankind, and the individual benefits from it only as a member of the human race. However, when an individual believes in Jesus Christ, he becomes partaker of a special grace which is his portion as an individual.

7. GOD'S PRESENT ADMINISTRATION IS IN SECRET.

Not only is God's present method of dealing gracious, it is also secret. This is the truth taught in **Ephesians 3: 9** where the phrase "**the fellowship of the mystery**" should read ***the secret administration***. Every fact of human experience gives witness to the fact that in the work which God is now doing He operates in secret. When He acts as the God of government He always works in the open. His ways are traceable and are never in secret. But when He operates in grace He may work in secret. In fact

He is doing this now. Because of this the world does not now understand or appreciate the grace that God is now showing.

8. MANKIND HAS FOR 2000 YEARS BEEN PRESERVED SOLELY BECAUSE OF THE ACTIVITIES OF GOD IN GRACE.

This proposition is a study by itself which can only be touched on here. At present God is acting as the Savior of mankind. Apart from this gracious work it would have long ago perished in its own corruption. Paul's words in I Timothy 4:10 declare this truth. No matter what the human race has done, God has in grace preserved it. He is now acting as the Savior of all mankind, and He is acting in a special way as the Savior of those who believe. It is only the believer who can claim forgiveness, redemption, and the promise of eternal life.

9. THE OUTCOME OF GOD'S PRESENT DISPLAY OF GRACE HAS BEEN FORETOLD.

The result among men of God's long display of grace is set forth by Paul in 2 Timothy 3:1-8; 3:12, 13; 4:3,4. This is in complete harmony with a declaration made long before in **Isaiah 26: 10:**

Let favor (grace) be shewed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness.

Let no one expect a converted world as a result of the grace which God is now showing to men. His present purpose is not to bring the world to His feet. This awaits the bringing in of His government. **When His judgments are in the Earth, the inhabitants of the earth will learn righteousness. Isaiah 26: 9.**

10. GOD'S GREAT DISPLAY OF GRACE WILL NOT END IN A DISPLAY OF WRATH.

If a man would display his patience, what value would it be if He ended it with a display of impatience? Patience does not consist of us curbing our impatience for a time. What value would be God's long display of grace if He closed it with a display of wrath. Let those who teach that the next thing the world will experience is the wrath of God, consider carefully that grace does not consist of God curbing His wrath.

11. GOD HAS FULLY SUCCEEDED IN HIS PRESENT PURPOSE.

He suspended His kingdom purposes in order. to display His grace. Each day since that time He has accomplished His purpose. Each day He has demonstrated the graciousness of His character. Each day has made history, and when this history is revealed it will be a record of the grace He has shown. Today we cannot read this

record. The record is secret. His work is untraceable. But a day is coming when the secret will be open and when the untraceable can be traced. Then when we stand with eyes that can truly see, and look back over 2000 years of history we will know that He was indeed the God of every grace.

12. GOD'S PRESENT SILENCE IS ESSENTIAL TO HIS PRESENT PURPOSE.

If in the past 2000 years God had spoken or acted in a manifest manner, if He had given absolute truth or directions to any, then His righteousness would have required Him to hold all such completely responsible and to deal with them in justice if they failed to walk according to the light given. This is the principle declared in John 15:22-24. God must always deal in justice with men to whom He has directly spoken so far as the matter revealed is concerned. Thus the silence of God makes possible a constant, consistent, uninterrupted flow of His grace in this dispensation. The Holy Spirit cooperates fully in this purpose and does nothing that would force God to abandon His dealing in grace in order to deal in justice.

13. GOD'S PRESENT CALLING OF BELIEVERS WILL STAND AS THE TROPHIES OF HIS GRACE AND WILL SERVE HIM IN RELATIONSHIP TO THE WITNESS OF HIS GRACE.

The believers in the Acts period were called in relationship to God's government, and they will serve Him in connection with His government when His kingdom purposes are resumed. The believers of the present time are called in connection with God's great display of grace and they 'will serve Him in extolling His grace in times to come. The Acts period believers are *government* men. We who believe now are grace men.

After setting forth some of the special things that God is now doing for those who believe, Paul declares in Ephesians 1:6 that these blessings are bestowed because God has predetermined those who are blessed shall extol (praise) the glory of His grace. In Ephesians 2: 7 he declares that God has done certain things with the end in view that "**in the ages to come He might shew the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.**" Those blessed in this manner are God's present calling. They are the trophies of His grace. They are the by-products of His great purpose to demonstrate the graciousness of His character.

The glory is His. The blessing is ours.

The End. #SS09

