

The Riches and the Fullness

The significance of “riches”

To know God and to know the way He works out His plan, we need to understand two words — riches and fullness. It is these two words that describe what kind of Person God is, what He is doing, the way He does it, what He is after, and what He is producing. Consider these anointed words that are given to us in the New Testament: the *riches* of His grace, the *riches* of His glory, the unsearchable *riches* of Christ, the *riches* of His kindness, and God who is *rich* in mercy. These utterances are not just meaningless words. They describe something of the reality of how we can know God.

Riches — this is a familiar word to all of us. People have dreamed about becoming rich in the lottery or in a sweepstakes by mail. We may have even been tempted when we have received something in the mail that said, “Get rich quick! Try this! Just sign on the dotted line and mail it in!” Have you not been tempted that way? Riches are the accumulation of a lot of wealth, a lot of goods, a lot of financial ability. Riches are also known as an abundance of capital. If you are going into business, you need capital. You need to have the wherewithal to produce and market the goods so that there is an expression resulting from that capital.

Riches. This is a word that Paul uses again and again in the New Testament. God is rich. So riches must be part of our comprehension of what it means to be related to the Lord and what it means to experience

the Lord. To know Him in our experience is to know the kind of God who is rich in grace and rich in mercy.

The riches of His mercy and kindness

We need mercy. And mercy needs a pitiful object! Mercy comes to someone who is so pitiful, so undeserving, and who doesn’t merit one thing. It comes to persons who are despicable, persons who are mean, who are “out of it”! Mercy is the word that describes God approaching that kind of person. That person needs mercy, like the blind man in the Gospels who cried out to the Lord, “Have mercy upon me, Lord!” He was an offscouring of humanity. Everyone else rejected him, but he cried out, “Have mercy!” This is the God of the universe — He is rich in mercy, rich in grace, rich in kindness.

Let us look at a remarkable utterance in Ephesians 2:7. Paul says, “That He might display in the ages to come the surpassing *riches* of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” Here are the surpassing riches of His grace, and they are manifested “in kindness.” Then in Romans 2:4 Paul says, “Or do you despise the *riches* of His kindness and forbearance and longsuffering, not knowing that God’s kindness is leading you to repentance?” Again Paul mentions the riches — the riches of His kindness.

Let us consider kindness on a human level. How do we treat animals? I always take note of the kind of person who stops and pets and shows affection to a

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little animal. There is just an atmosphere of kindness. Sometimes on a newscast we have seen animals that have been neglected and starved. They are just skin and bones. But then you see someone taking them and petting them and feeding them. They have been so hurt, so demeaned, and then kindness comes. Spiritually speaking, some of us are like those animals. We are skinny. We haven't eaten anything. We have been neglected. And as a result we have developed putrefying sores. But then God takes us and is kind to us. He feeds us and wraps up our wounds. These are the riches of His kindness. Do you need kindness? Then you need to know God. You need to know God this way — by the riches of His kindness, the riches of His mercy, the riches of His grace.

The riches of His grace

The word “riches” unveils God’s whole economy of grace. It is the grace of God not only having favor toward us because of Christ, but also coming into us to do in us what we could never do in ourselves. He Himself within us supplies the grace. So the phrase “the riches of His grace” depicts the New Testament economy. It is impressive to see that nearly all of the 27 books of the New Testament end in the same way: “The *grace* of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all,” or “The *grace* of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit,” or “*Grace* be with you all.” Out of everything that could be said at the end, the Holy Spirit keeps summarizing and leaving one last word, “*Grace* be with your spirit.” That means, “The riches of what God has provided be with you.” It means, “Supply be with you.” Let God be your source. Let Him be your supply. So the riches are the accumulation of all that He is in His grace.

The significance of “fullness”

The word “fullness” is especially related to the word “riches.” These two words appear together throughout the New Testament, showing that the riches have something to do with the fullness, and the fullness has something to do with the riches. In Ephesians 1:7 Paul says, “In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of offenses, according to the *riches* of His grace.” Then in verse 18 he says, “The eyes of your heart having been enlightened, that you may know what is the hope of His calling, and what are

the *riches* of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.” So here we have riches again. And then Paul says in verses 22-23, ²² “And He subjected all things under His feet and gave Him to be Head over all things to the church, ²³ which is His Body, the *fullness* of the One who fills all in all.” So the church is the fullness of the One who is filling. And His riches are what He is filling the church with. It is the riches that produce this fullness.

Then in Ephesians 3:8 Paul says, “To me, less than the least of all saints, was this grace given to announce to the Gentiles the unsearchable *riches* of Christ as the gospel.” Here Paul summarizes what his ministry is for. It is to announce. It is to speak good news. It is to tell forth the unsearchable riches of Christ. Then in verses 18-19 he says, ¹⁸ “May be full of strength to apprehend with all the saints what the breadth and length and height and depth are ¹⁹ and to know the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ, that you may be filled unto all the *fullness* of God.” So when we preach the riches of Christ, what comes out is the church, a vessel being filled with all the fullness of God. So these two words, “riches” and “fullness,” go together.

Now let me use myself as an illustration of fullness. My fullness is the result of partaking of many riches. I wear an extra-large coat. This is fullness! Fullness is here. Why? Because every day I partake of all the riches that have been produced in this country — from steak to pork chops to spaghetti to pilaf to salads to all the desserts. I enjoy all the riches, and eventually I become the fullness! So let me boast about my fullness because it has come by partaking of the riches. We can see that the way the fullness happens is by participating in the riches.

The way to have the church life as the fullness

Paul knew that the way to have the church on the earth is not by organizing something. It is not by “setting up shop.” It is by having a fullness here and a fullness there — a fullness in this city and a fullness in another city. There has to be a fullness. There has to be something standing there with a fullness. And that fullness is the fullness of God. That fullness is the church, the vessel of the One who is filling all in all. There is an ongoing flow from this One who is filling. And this flow is coming into all the members and through all the members, producing a fullness — the love, the joy, the kindness, the care — a church life.

This is the expression of fullness. This church life that is filled with the fullness of God is coming out of everyone enjoying the riches — the riches of His grace, the riches of His mercy, the riches of His kindness. All the riches of Christ enjoyed by us in a practical, experiential way produce the fullness. It is out of enjoying the riches that we become the fullness. This is the pattern unveiled in the New Testament. It shows us that the way the church happens on the earth is by the enjoyment of all these riches. So we have to learn how to tap into the riches.

The unsearchable riches of Christ as good news

The concentration of these riches is seen in the phrase in Ephesians 3:8, “the unsearchable riches of Christ.” Paul is saying, “God sent me to announce, to preach, to give out as the gospel, the unsearchable riches of Christ.” This means that the ministry you and I need to receive, the kind of speaking we need to hear, is a ministry that will produce the fullness. It is a ministry that is gospeling the unsearchable riches of Christ — all that is in Him, all that He is, all that He has accumulated in His Person and through His work — now to be dispensed. So we need the kind of ministry that speaks this, that writes this, as the gospel. When Paul uses the word “preach” in the phrase “to *preach* among the nations the unsearchable riches of Christ,” he is not just referring to the activity of preaching. He is also including the way it comes. That is, it comes as good news. It breaks in upon you to pull you out of your doldrums, out of your sinking well, out of that preoccupation with your self. It comes to you in such a way that you hear *good news!* You are in your bed with your face down in the pillow, and there is good news that comes and awakens your ear — Jesus is alive and He loves you! He is saying, “I love you, and I have much grace for you and much mercy for you!”

The good news of looking at the brass serpent

In the Old Testament book of Numbers, when the children of Israel were bitten by serpents, they were to blame for it (21:4-9). They had complained against God and against Moses. They had sinned. They were guilty. They deserved judgment for their rebellion. So the poisonous serpents bit them. Whenever we rebel against God, whenever we close our door to God, we

are just left to snakes. When we are left to our self, we are left to serpents. And they bite!

But then the children of Israel repented. They confessed, “We have sinned.” So what did God do? How did God respond? He told Moses to put up a pole with a brass serpent on it. And then Moses told the people, “Whenever you are bitten, look at that brass serpent and you will live. Look and live.” Later, in the Gospel of John, Jesus refers to this account, saying, “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up” (3:14). That brass serpent was a type of our Christ. In the likeness of the flesh of sin, He bore all the judgment (Rom. 8:3).

Notice that it was a brass serpent. Brass in the Bible typifies judgment. This means all the judgment went to Christ. He was judged for our sin. He paid the price for our guilt, for our condemnation. He bore it all. So when you are bitten, do not look at your bite. The Word says, “When you are bitten, look at the brass serpent.” Many times when something happens to us, it is our fault, it is our sin. We know it. It is our rebellion. And then we find the enemy biting us here and biting us there. At this point, what can happen to us is that we start looking at all our wounds. We look at what we have done, and we begin to analyze — “If I wouldn’t have done that, things wouldn’t be like they are in my life!” We are in that realm. And the more you are in that realm, the more your conscience is beaten, beaten, beaten down! You can’t open your mouth, because your conscience knows and is telling you, “You have done it again.” And the enemy is biting you because of your own sin.

But look at God’s way. When you are bitten, He doesn’t tell you to look at your wounds. So we need not get into that realm. Let your conscience rise up to the blood of the Lamb, and look at the brazen serpent who bore it all, who took it all. And then watch your conscience get cleansed and watch the freedom come and watch your spirit soar. Your spirit soars and your conscience is released because of that look at the brass serpent — because of that look at our Christ who took all our judgment. Lord, thank You for what You have done! Thank You, Jesus! What release!

Christ becoming our Substitute is an example of His kindness. The accumulation of the unsearchable riches of Christ are available to us. They are for us to participate in. That is good news to hear. When my

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Christ as a Shoot and a Branch

(Part Two)

“There shall come forth a Shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a Branch from his roots will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him . . .”

—Isaiah 11:1-2

In the previous issue of *the Christian*, we saw that Christ is a Shoot out of the stump of Jesse and a Branch that bears fruit. The stump of Jesse refers to the throne of David, which by the time of Isaiah had lost all the glory that had attended the reign of King David and King Solomon. The great tree, which symbolized that glorious reign, had fallen and been reduced to a mere stump. Yet, Isaiah prophesied of a Shoot that would come forth out of that humbled stump. This Shoot refers to Christ, the descendant of Jesse and David. It specifically points to Christ in His incarnation as the man who came not with outward glory and splendor but in a lowly and humble state, even as a slave. Then, this Shoot took root and grew into a Branch and ultimately bore much fruit. This refers to Christ in His human living, death, and resurrection. And finally, we see that this Shoot and Branch is the King of the kingdom of God. That is, the Shoot and Branch assumes His place as the King of kings in the glorious kingdom. What does this disclose to us about the kingdom? It discloses that the nature of the kingdom of God is completely different from that of the kingdoms of the world. The world’s kingdoms are based on pride, position, power, and self-exaltation. God’s kingdom is based on life. It is based on a Shoot sprouting forth, taking root, branching out, and bearing fruit. This is the nature of the kingdom of God — it is a kingdom of life.

Born into the Kingdom

If indeed the nature of God’s kingdom is life, then how does one gain admittance into it? How is citizenship obtained? According to the Scriptures, there is only one way — you must be born into it. That is, a new life must be birthed within us. In His conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” and “unless a man is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:3-6). We know that Nicodemus was an older man, a Pharisee, and a ruler of the Jews. And we can safely assume that the explicit aim of much of his life was to gain admittance into the kingdom of God. As a good Pharisee he strove, with great assiduousness, to earn his way into the kingdom. How? By careful obedience to the Mosaic law. He spent every day, even every hour, attempting to follow the minutest regulation of the law. By so doing, he thought his acceptance into the kingdom would be assured.

But Jesus came and told him something radically different. Jesus told him that all the effort he had expended to gain entrance into the kingdom of God was of no value. God’s kingdom cannot be entered by means of the works of the law or the efforts of the flesh. What we are by our first birth — that is, what we can accomplish through our own natural talents and energy — is of no avail in the kingdom of God. Flesh and blood simply cannot inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 15:50). There is only one way to enter the kingdom — you must be born into it. Unless Nicodemus were to be born again, Jesus said that he would not even *see* the kingdom, much less enter into it. No wonder Nicodemus was astonished and asked, “How can this be?”

“You must be born again.” In other words, you must receive Another life. This Other life does not come from our parents. This life can only come from God Himself. Hence, Jesus says that we must be born of the Spirit. That which is born of the flesh (our parents) is flesh (what we are by our natural birth). But that which is born of the Spirit (the Holy Spirit) is spirit (our human spirit). So what does it mean to be born again? It means to receive the life of God into our spirit. It means to receive a life entirely different from our natural life. Receiving eternal life is not just obtaining the ability to live forever — it is receiving the life of God, which has the characteristic of being eternal. And by being born of the Spirit, we receive His life, we can see and enter into the kingdom of God, and we live forever.

The Growth of His Life

Now, it is crucial to lay hold of this one important fact — Jesus never intended that we would receive His life and then let it lie dormant. No! Jesus expected that once birthed within us, His life would be allowed to branch out and live. Life is not meant to lie dormant, but to grow and mature. Paul declared that Christ lives in us and that He is our life (Col. 3:4). But he also declared, “It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me” (Gal. 2:20), and “For to me, to live is Christ” (Phil. 1:21). Yes, His life indwells us. But He expects to see His life lived out through us. Hence, Jesus Christ is still the Shoot that is sprouting, growing, branching out, and bearing fruit. But the marvelous thing is this — He is now sprouting, growing, branching out, and bearing fruit *in us!*

This is what Jesus had in mind when He said, “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). As the branches, we are attached to Christ. We are in an organic union with Him. We are not one with Christ in merely a doctrinal way, but we are one with Him in life — organically. We have been joined to the Living One! (Rom. 7:4). And because of this, He flows in us. His life sap flows into the branches. And as

His life fills us and grows in us, He spontaneously bears fruit in us. Fruit is not borne by religious effort, but by the flow and growth of divine life.

What then is our responsibility? To simply abide in Him. “Abide in Me,” Jesus said. The Greek word for abide is μένω, which can also be translated “to remain.” Abide in Christ. Remain in Christ. If we do, Jesus declares, we will bear much fruit. What does this mean in our practical daily lives? Each day we encounter all kinds of circumstances and environments. At home, at work, at school. With our family, our friends, our colleagues. In our relationships, our finances, our successes and failures, our strengths and weaknesses. Each day seems to have an abundant supply of challenges and difficulties. The question is this: How do we respond to each environment? How do we handle the circumstances that inevitably come our way? Do we come out to meet them in our own wisdom and strength? Do we try to manipulate our environments to our advantage? Do we get caught up in anxiety and concern? Do we ponder, think, wonder, analyze, and plan? Do we react and blame?

Jesus said, “Abide in Me.” That is, simply stay in Him. As environments come, consciously commit them to Him. Refer them to Him. Look at Him, and not at the environments. Hold on to Him, and refuse to let go. Touch Him. Inwardly draw from Him. Call on Him. Pray to Him. Sing to Him. If necessary, shout to Him! Just stay in your organic union with Him, and let the life sap flow in you. Let Him live in you. Let Him meet every environment. Don’t come out to meet anything in yourself. Refuse to budge from your organic union with Him. As Paul says, be found in Him (Phil. 3:9). Do not be found outside of Him in your manipulations or reactions or anxiety. Just be found abiding in Christ. Then fruit will be borne in your life. You will begin to find the reactions of Christ in your daily life. You will find the reactions of love, joy, peace, patience, and self-control, even in the midst of the most trying environment. And you will know that these reactions are not out of your natural life. By your own experience, you know that you could never react like this. You are not capable of such wonderful and transcendent reactions. It is Christ in you doing the living. He has branched out and borne fruit.

The Regulation of Life

Living out Christ and not living out ourselves. What does this have to do with the kingdom of God? Everything. Why? Because as we live out Christ and not ourselves, we are under a divine regulation. We know that in any kingdom there must be regulation. Even the word “kingdom” implies that a government is in place and that there is subjection to the rule of a king. This is certainly the case with the kingdom of God. Jesus is the King, and we as His subjects are under His authority,

kingship, and lordship. Yet, the way Jesus rules His subjects is very unique. In the kingdoms of the world, the king rules by outward coercion and the threat of external punishment. But Christ rules and regulates inwardly by life. He is the Branch in the kingdom of God.

As one of the great promises of the New Covenant, God announced that He will impart His laws into our mind, and inscribe them on our hearts (Heb. 8:10). The very life we receive comes with an automatic, “built in” regulation. Remember that God is always righteous and holy. That is His nature. Under the Old Covenant, God expressed what He is in the law He gave, and then His people, Israel, were commanded to obey and conform to the law. However, this was an outward regulation that depended wholly on the energy of the flesh to be fulfilled. But under the New Covenant, God takes a completely different way. He gives His Son to us to be our life. And in this life is the power to regulate us and to actually change our hearts. His life imparts His laws — His righteousness and holiness — into our mind. This means that we begin to think as God thinks and feel as God feels. We begin to detest sin and to feel uncomfortable with the world as God does. We begin to desire the Word of God, prayer, and the fellowship in the church as God does. We begin to love others unconditionally as God does. This is divine regulation, but it is not outward or forced. It is as natural as can be! Why? Because it is imparted into us by His life.

“It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me.” When “I” is no longer lived, and Christ is lived instead, then the reality of the kingdom is present. The life of the flesh and the self must be denied. That old life, with its undesirable works, has no place in the kingdom (Gal. 5:19-21). It was crucified with Christ, and it is to be denied by us. Then we must simply abide in Christ, and let the Branch spread out in us. As we do, we bear the fruit that is acceptable in the kingdom and that even comprises the reality of the kingdom (Rom. 14:17; Gal. 5:22-23; 6:7-9).

Reigning in Life

As the Branch spreads out in us, we not only experience the fruit of the Spirit such as love, joy, peace, and longsuffering, but we also find that the life of Christ begins to overcome every negative thing in us — whether sin, the flesh, the old man, the self, the natural life, strongholds of the enemy, hatred, bitterness, jealousy, or anxiety. The Spirit operates to set us free from their tyranny (Rom. 6:14; 7:24—8:2; John 8:36; 2 Cor. 10:3-5). For years we may have been under the cruel sway of strongholds that we have been helpless to overcome. But the Spirit transmits to us the victory of Christ’s resurrection to tear down every stronghold.

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conscience is afflicted and I've been bitten by the serpent — in that state I need to hear about the unsearchable riches of Christ. One of those riches is that on the cross He became sin for us. He was in the form of the brass serpent — He took the judgment: “He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed” (Isa. 53:5). That is good news. And it is out of hearing that good news that I say “Amen” and “Thank You, Jesus,” and I participate in the riches of this Christ.

Speaking the unsearchable riches of Christ to others

Recently, the brother of one of the saints was saved. As we talked together, he said to me, “I feel so unworthy. I'm just so unworthy to receive Christ. I have gone my own way. I have seen what has happened to my brother since he got saved. I have seen you people, but I have gone my own way. I have my own life. I'm so unworthy.” But I said to him, “Look at what Isaiah 53:6 says, ‘All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.’” I said to him, “Your iniquity is on Him. It is not on you anymore. Look at Christ. He took it all. You don't have to take it anymore. He took the beating so you don't have to take the beating. Now you just enjoy His riches — what He did for you on the cross.”

This is good news. This is the speaking of the riches of Christ as good news. You do not have to be a certain kind of person. You do not have to be “up to standard” according to your thought. And it is not a matter of being “cut” a certain way. This good news is for sinners! It is for the ungodly. He justifies the ungodly! It is for “dead” people! He has made us alive who were dead in trespasses and sins. These are the riches. When you enjoy this, you can't help but flow out to others. You can't help but spill out and sing and speak and share and testify. And this is how the church becomes the fullness. It is not a group of religious people. It is a group of people who are enjoying the unsearchable riches of Christ.

The accumulation of the riches

Now let us look at the accumulation of these riches in Colossians 1. Verses 18-19 say, ¹⁸ “He is the Head of the Body, the church; He is the beginning, the

Firstborn from the dead, that He Himself might have the first place in all things; ¹⁹ for in Him all the fullness was pleased to dwell.” This shows us God's analysis of Christ. God's analysis is that “in Him all the fullness was pleased to dwell.” So we should never think that we are going to find fullness outside of Him! There is no fullness, no satisfaction, outside of Christ. All else is a cheap imitation. It runs out. Hebrews 11:25 calls it “the passing pleasures of sin.” It leaves you empty. In Christ all the fullness was pleased to dwell. This means satisfaction, fullness, is in Him. It is concentrated in Him. All this fullness has been accumulated in Him.

Let us see how this fullness has emerged. John 1:1 says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Then the Word became flesh (v. 14). He became a man. And as a man He passed through so many things in His human living. And then He died on the cross and was buried. Then He was resurrected and He ascended and was seated at the right hand of God. He was made Lord and Christ. And this whole process was accumulated in His Person. So now the fullness that dwells in Him is the accumulation not only of divinity but also of humanity, not only of God but also of man.

There is an accumulation in His Person. And in that accumulation, there is thought-life. There are reactions. There are feelings. There are inclinations. There are choices. There is a will. All this was part of His humanity. As a man, He lived the proper human life. He was the Son of Man. In His thought-life, in His reactions, in His feelings, in His inclinations, in His choices, He lived one with the Father's life. And that perfect life was all accumulated into His humanity, never to be put off, never to be lost. And then that perfect life went through death. On the cross He died to sin, to the world, and to the law, and He stripped off the devil. He did everything on that cross. Then He was put into the tomb. But death could not hold that resurrection life. Acts 2:27 tells us that His soul would not be abandoned to Hades. He burst the tomb and shot through the layers of demons and principalities and powers and went to the throne. And all this was accumulated in His Person. All this makes up the riches — the unsearchable riches of Christ.

Being connected with the accumulated riches

Let me give another illustration. It is one thing to talk about the richest man in the world. And it is

another thing to live on his property and be connected to him. You have to get connected to the person. So here are all these riches. You can read about the riches, you can know about the riches, but somehow you need to be able to tap into the riches. There are many rich people in the world, but you can't touch their riches. But here is our God and all the capital in the Godhead — the riches of Christ. In John 1:14 He became a man. In incarnation, He became flesh. You could touch Him. He was a real man. And then in resurrection He became “a life-giving Spirit” (1 Cor. 15:45). So not only was He a man with humanity, but that humanity, in resurrection, became a life-giving Spirit. Now all the riches in this process have been poured out in resurrection as the life-giving Spirit to come into me. We begin with a dead spirit. There is no life there. So the riches are coming in order that they might be imparted directly into my spirit and give life to my spirit. The riches of Christ are now flowing and available in the Spirit. All the fullness dwells in Him. And now this One is in our spirit giving life and imparting the riches.

So the only thing that matters is that we open to Him and let Him in. And once we let Him in, He stays there and waits for us to participate in Him anytime and anywhere. Just participate in Him. John 1:16 says, “For of His fullness we have all received, and grace in exchange for grace.” This is our Christian life. Out of the riches of the fullness that is in Him we have all received. The word “received” here is not in the present tense. So it is not referring to receiving over and over again. In the original language, it is in the past tense, something that happened at a point in time. And once it happened it was finalized. It is done and it is there. “Out of His fullness we have all received” means we have received Him once and for all. And the only thing left for us to do is to constantly participate in Him.

In the midst of your daily living there is a rising of your heart to say “Jesus,” and you give voice to it. You participate in that life. It is not becoming a Christian all over again. It is not a starting all over again. We have received Him once, and it is a finalized fact in our spirit. Now we just need to learn how to relate everything to Him, call on His Name, participate in Him in the midst of so many things that we pass through. We have thought-life. We have reactions. We have our feelings. We have our inclinations. We have our choices. But now God's goal is that *His* thoughts, *His* reactions, *His* feelings — all that is in Him — would become our

portion by participating in Him. So now it is an experience of just opening to Him, calling upon Him, communing with Him, laying out our feelings before Him. Just tell Him, “Thank You, Lord, You did it all on the cross. Now from my spirit do it all in me.” Jesus does it all. Our life is a constant affirmation again and again of just learning to receive out of His fullness.

Grace in exchange for grace

Again, John 1:16 says, “grace in exchange for grace.” Some of the translators render this as “grace upon grace,” referring to an accumulation of grace. This truth is in the New Testament, but, strictly speaking, here it is not accurate to translate it “grace upon grace.” If John had wanted to say “grace upon grace,” he would have used the Greek preposition *epi*, which means *upon*. But he doesn't use that preposition. He uses the preposition *anti*, which means *grace in exchange for grace*. Then in verse 17 John is setting up the law as the antithesis of grace. He is contrasting law and grace: “For the law was given through Moses; grace and reality came through Jesus Christ.” When you are under the law, you have a relationship with God that is based upon *you* coming up with the goods and getting rewarded for what you do. Your whole orientation under the law is that God expects you to keep it, and you will be rewarded. You will get some imputed righteousness and you will get some grace and favor. You will get blessing. Blessing will come if you come up with the goods. But if you do not come up with the goods, you are under the curse. You are under judgment. This is the law.

The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. Now out of His fullness there is a whole new economy and a whole new orientation of man to God. It is not law, it is grace. And it is grace in exchange for grace. In the Old Testament economy it was the keeping of the law in exchange for grace. But in the New Testament economy it is starting with grace. It is getting the blessing before you deserve it. It is getting the favor before you work for it. It is just being forgiven. It is just being washed clean. The slate is clean without any merit of our own. It is not by works of righteousness which we have done. It is not something that we can boast in. It is not that now we have measured up, so we can get the grace. No. God starts with dead, sinful, rebellious, ungodly people, and

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breaks in upon that environment and forgives and washes. You are ushered into a whole realm of the riches of His grace. You started with grace, and now the grace just keeps flowing and mounting. This is grace in exchange for grace.

R. C. H. Lenski, one of the old Lutheran commentators, wrote on the phrase in John 1:16, “grace in exchange for grace.” He says, “As the days come and go a new supply takes the place of the grace already bestowed, as wave follows wave upon the shore. Grace answers to grace. Hence grace for (ἀντί) grace is not the grace of the New Testament for that of the Old; not ordinary grace followed by charismatic grace; not merely one individual gift of grace followed by another individual gift — but grace ever new and greater. One measure of it assures another. It is like a stream flowing constantly; every day, every hour its banks are full, ever fresh volumes coming down from above, so that no longing for grace in our hearts is left without immediate and complete supply.” This is grace in exchange for grace. These are the riches of His grace.

So in our despicable conditions — however they may be, whatever they may be, dispositionally, behaviorally, whatever — we are under the economy of grace. All He needs is an acknowledgment of our need. We simply bow and admit our need. And when we do, we are emptying out our vessel for the riches of Another life to come in. So the way to participate in His riches is just to be empty, to have need, to let the Lord defeat you, and to be a person who is open to Him, calling on His name, feeding on His Word, taking Him in. In all these ways we are partaking of the riches of the divine nature. This produces the fullness of God, which is the church expressing all that Christ is. Oh, may God grant us a full enjoyment of the riches for the fullness to be manifested to the universe.

— Bill Freeman

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The apostle Paul uses a unique phrase to describe this process within us. He refers to it as “the swallowing up of death” (1 Cor. 15:54; 2 Cor. 5:4). We must understand that death in the biblical sense does not refer merely to our physical demise. Death is spoken of as an enemy which operates in men even as they live, and which ultimately conquers every man through physical death, and which holds them in its prison even after death. Death is like a strong enemy which moves gradually, yet inexorably, forward to defeat us (1 Cor. 15:26; Eph. 2:1; Rom. 8:6, 10;

Heb. 2:14; Acts 2:24). Men experience the effects of death in their *spirit* due to the fact that they are spiritually dead apart from Christ. Men experience death in their *souls* through such emotions as depression, despair, emptiness, hopelessness, and purposelessness. Men experience death in their *bodies* since every man eventually dies. And finally, men experience death in the after-life in that death holds them in a state of separation from God.

In the old man, life always loses to death. Indeed, all life is eventually swallowed up by death, so that death reigns over life. But in Christ, it is a completely different story! In Christ, resurrection life is victor (2 Tim. 1:10). It is no longer death swallowing life, but life swallowing death! When the life of Jesus Christ is birthed within us, He grows and branches out. And as He does, He swallows up all the effects of death in us. He swallows up bondage to sin. He swallows up depression and hopelessness. He swallows up jealousy, bitterness, and anger. He even gives life to our mortal bodies (Rom. 8:11). Christ stops death in its tracks and reverses the process, taking over more and more of our being with life (Gal. 6:8). He is now the One moving gradually, yet inexorably, forward, defeating every form of death in us. Amen!

Eventually, when Jesus comes again and we are raised up with Him in new, resurrection bodies, death will be completely defeated in us. Death will be completely eradicated from our being, and we will be able to declare with Paul, “O death, where is your victory?” (1 Cor. 15:55). The Branch will have grown in us to such an extent that every vestige of death will be erased and we will be those who are “reigning in life” (Rom. 5:17). This is the nature of the kingdom of God. It is Christ as the Branch growing in us to the extent that His life takes over and occupies our whole being. Thus, we will reign with Him by reigning in life.

— Kirk Eland

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