

DISTINCTIVES OF GRACE
Bible Study Notes #1, August 7 & 14, 2005

(Explain the original intent to study the book of 1 Peter. Use MacArthur's answer to the question "What is the most asked question of all that Grace to You receives?" Election is the first main doctrinal topic in 1 Peter.) Simultaneously, Debbie and I have been noticing that many of you seem to continue to have many questions about such controversial doctrines as election. It is also apparent that the reason many like MacArthur are doing more "top-ositional" teaching recently, (versus "expositional" verse by verse Scriptural studies), is that the church itself is no longer "the church of the living God, the pillar and support or foundation of the truth." (1Tim. 3:15) Therefore, many doctrinal issues that were once commonly accepted by the Bible believing church are now either ignored, misunderstood, corrupted or even attacked. As MacArthur once expressed, the last thing he ever anticipated was that he would be defending the Bible from attack from the "church." So it is almost an emergency situation to regain and rebuild the basic and fundamental doctrines, before we can again focus upon the details and specifics that come from close expositional studies.

So we have prayerfully considered what God would have me to teach in this special time, and determined that perhaps a real (as opposed to "felt") need may be a review and brief study of the foundational and distinctive doctrines that are both Biblical and contemporary issues today. I believe more than ever before, the church of the living God must seek to once again become that "pillar and support of the truth." We cannot do so if we do not know what the Bible teaches, believe it, teach it and live it out to God's glory.

- 1. What are the doctrinal distinctives of Grace Fellowship? In other words, what distinguishes our beliefs from others who might also claim to be evangelical Protestant Christians, or even Bible believers, or even good Baptists? Are these distinctives critical or important, or are they merely another means of dividing Christ's church with man-made philosophies, traditions and denominationalism? Are these just like other differences in belief about worship styles (traditional or contemporary), sign gifts (conservative or charismatic), baptism (immersion or sprinkling, believer's or infants), church government (elder, deacon, committee, congregational rule), etc.? If they are so important, why don't (more) others also focus upon them, teach and believe them? Are these new teachings or just odd slants of the Christian faith that are rarely seen elsewhere? (History of the Faith)**

From the beginning of time, God has been revealing Himself to His creation including mankind. From the very beginning, He has been dispensing TRUTH. Mankind, Satan and his demons have worked hard and continually to distort, twist and stop this (gospel) truth, but it cannot be stopped or overcome. We must see history as a "stream of truth" from God, seek to know it and live within it, both as individuals and churches. As an analogy, we might think of a tree with its roots in God. The "sap" of truth which brings

life grows the tree taller and taller from age to age. Many branches may develop, but the ones that remain connected to the life source (the “vine”) remain true and a very real part of the tree, closely following each other as they reach for the sky. But the world, Satan and men continue to graft in error and untruth, producing branches that may even take away from the “truth tree.” But these false branches are not a part of the stream or tree of truth, and eventually will fall away, be gathered and burned up.

(Discuss and illustrate the stages of the true faith from Adam until now, progressing from Garden Faith, to Abrahamic Faith, to the Law, to the True Jewish Faith, to Christ, to the Apostolic Faith, to the New Testament Faith, to the “catholic” Faith, to the Reformed Faith. Discuss differences between historic Calvinism and the caricature called Calvinism, between historic Protestantism and broad grouping of the same, between historic Baptists and modern day Baptists.)

2. **How does it change us as a church or us as individuals to hold to and believe these distinctives? Is this course needed or desired?**
3. **The Greater 5 and the Lesser 5! What are they?**
The Greater 5: The Solas: Scripture Alone, Grace Alone, Faith Alone, Christ Alone, For God’s Glory Alone (The Cambridge Declaration)
The Lesser 5: The Doctrines of Grace, or the 5 Points of Historic Calvinism Total (Radical) Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited (Specific) Atonement, Irresistible Grace (Effectual Call), Preservation (Perseverance) of the Saints
4. **Why are these so controversial, even inflammatory, even among those who claim to also believe the Bible? Why are these so hard to believe, much less understand or apply? Should we even try to understand them? If so, how?**
5. **The correct view of God – High and Biblical**
A. W. Tozer in *The Knowledge of the Holy*, “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.”

Consider Colossians 1:15-17 as an example of the just the creative power and nature of God. 15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16 For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. 17 He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.

The *declaration* of creation: Three-fold about Him!

1. *He created* all things! (v. 16)
2. *He is before* all things! (v. 17)

3. *He holds all things together!* (v. 17)

Consider the astronomical world :

The earth has a diameter of almost 8000 miles, and our moon about 2000 miles.

Saturn's diameter is over 74,000 miles, and Jupiter's is almost 89,000 miles.

But the Sun has a diameter of almost 865,000 miles!

The sun is so big that over 1.3 million earths could fit inside it,
with room left over for 4.2 million moon's!

We are so far away from the Sun, it takes light almost 8.5 minutes to reach us,
traveling at 186,000 miles per second. The nearest other star is so far away that
its light takes over 4 years to reach us, over 24 trillion miles!

Yet the Sun, and earth's orbit are dwarfed by the size of some stars:

The red giants Antares and Betelgeuse are over 560 and 900 times as big as our
Sun! If the star Betelgeuse were placed in the spot our star, the Sun, occupies it
it would consume the orbits and planets of Mercury, Venus and Earth!

Each galaxy has hundreds of billions of stars, and there are (at least) hundreds of
billions of galaxies. In fact scientists have estimated the number of observable
stars at over 10 to the 25 power: 10 million billion billion!

Equal to the number of grains of sand on all the beaches of the world!

Who produced all of this? "Well... once there was nothing, then there was everything in
one point of space, then there was a "big bang!" Hah!!!

No wonder Isaiah says:

Isaiah 40:22-26 ²² It is He who sits above the vault of the earth, And its inhabitants are
like grasshoppers, Who stretches out the heavens like a curtain And spreads them out
like a tent to dwell in. ²³ He *it is* who reduces rulers to nothing, Who makes the judges of
the earth meaningless. ²⁴ Scarcely have they been planted, Scarcely have they been
sown, Scarcely has their stock taken root in the earth, But He merely blows on them,
and they wither, And the storm carries them away like stubble. ²⁵ **"To whom then will
you liken Me That I should be *his* equal?"** says the Holy One. ²⁶ **Lift up your eyes on
high And see who has created these *stars*,** The One who leads forth their host by
number, He calls them all by name; **Because of the greatness of His might and the
strength of *His* power** Not one *of them* is missing. (NASB)

Consider all the life on earth. The thousands and thousands of numbers of each
species, the thousands and thousands of each species of plants and animals. Even the
wonder and complexity of our own bodies: consisting of over 10 to the 14 power or 100
trillion individual cells! A 747 Airplane has only about 6 million parts, over half of which
are fasteners. So it is much more logical for a scrap yard of parts to evolve into a 747,
take off and fly than for a human being to evolve from a pool of primordial soup! In fact,
we have more bacteria in our intestines than the number of all the people who have
ever lived on earth!

Who created all of this? “Well... once there was a puddle of water with the just the right mix of matter and energy, and the first cell was born! Then...everything else just naturally evolved!” How stupid can we be?

Romans 1:23: “Professing to be wise, they became fools!”

Now, consider the **invisible creation**:

Genesis 2:1 ¹ Thus the **heavens** and the earth were completed, **and all their hosts**.

Nehemiah 9:6 ⁶ "Thou alone art the LORD. **Thou hast made the heavens, The heaven of heavens with all their host**, The earth and all that is on it, The seas and all that is in them. Thou dost give life to all of them And the heavenly host bows down before Thee. (NASB)

Wow!!! Not to even mention His nature and power in love, wrath, mercy, justice, omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence, providence, etc. etc....

Isaiah 55:9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts. (NASB)

Romans 11:33 O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable are His ways!

Let God define Himself; do not impose our attitudes and concepts about God onto God. God is God, not Who we think God is! Perhaps the most forgotten and overlooked aspect of God is His Sovereignty!

(Reference Verses about God’s Sovereignty and Questions about God’s Sovereignty. Discuss)

6. The correct view of man – Low and Sinful

Man is always seeking new ways to compliment and elevate himself, even to the status of a god. If he lowers God enough and elevates himself enough, then the vast gulf that exists between him and God disappears in his mind and with it the need for God.

Self-help, the power of positive thinking, untapping the potential in you, the basic goodness in man, man’s ability to progress scientifically, humanism, and many other means of man worshipping himself are more popular today than ever before. Plus the culture of shifting blame to others, making each of us victims of our culture and nature, and explaining away sin as relative and subjective helps man to remove any sense of sinfulness or guilt.

7. Is God confused or His word conflicted? What is the difference between a contradiction, paradox and mystery? Does God have more than one will?

Are all teachings of the Bible somewhat difficult? Why are some Biblical doctrines so controversial, hated and rejected? The question of “WHY GOD?”

Contradiction – A statement or teaching containing parts that are logically incongruous or incompatible. Real contradictions cannot exist, especially in Biblical truth or the mind of God; they violate the laws of logic. Therefore contradictions are an impossibility!

Paradox – An apparent contradiction that upon closer scrutiny or with more information can be resolved. Paradoxes do not violate any laws of logic. They are merely “seeming contradictions.”

Mystery – Things which are true but we cannot understand. These things may be understood later with more information or examination, or after they are revealed to us.

It is easy to confuse mysteries and contradictions. But mysteries are capable of being understood, while contradictions are not. All contradictions are mysterious; not all mysteries are contradictions. Mysteries may be true; contradictions may never be true!

- **“Truths in Tension”** - Dual truths from the Scriptures that often seem to us to oppose each other, but may actually serve to increase or emphasize each other all the more!

Deut. 29:29 (NASB)

"The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law.

2 Peter 3:16 (NASB)

as also in all *his* letters, speaking in them of these things, in **which are some things hard to understand**, which the untaught and unstable distort, as *they do* also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.

8. Are all teachings of the Bible somewhat difficult?

YES. We just don't see them as so, or do not want to see them as so. Many are so comforting to us, or we have been exposed to them for all of our lives, so we accept things that are mysterious or paradoxical even as if they are not!

9. Why are some Biblical doctrines so controversial, hated and rejected?

Because some get too close to attacking us or our views of God we have created to soothe us. Election is the most pride crushing doctrine, so it is also the most hated. No other teaching destroys any thought of our ability to save ourselves as it does. But others are equally paradoxical, mysterious or hard to understand.

Examples:

1. The Trinity – three in one, one in three, both one and three
2. The Hypostatic Union of Christ – both 100% man and 100% God
3. Christ's desire or will to both hide and reveal truth to His children: Luke 19:41-42 & Luke 10:21

Luke 19:41-42 (NASB)

And when He approached, He saw the city and **wept over it**, [42] saying, "If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! **But now they have been hidden from your eyes.**

Luke 10:21 (NASB)

At that very time **He rejoiced greatly** in the Holy Spirit, and said, "**I praise Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou didst hide these things from the wise and intelligent and didst reveal them to babes.** Yes, Father, **for thus it was well-pleasing in Thy sight.**

4. **The evil and Satanic act of Judas's betrayal (Mat. 26:24, Luke 22:3), and its use by God to accomplish His plan (Acts 2:23). The same with the leaders of Jerusalem (Acts 4:27-28).**

Matthew 26:24 (NASB)

"The Son of Man is to go, **just as it is written of Him; but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born.**"

Luke 22:3 (NASB)

And **Satan entered into Judas** who was called Iscariot, belonging to the number of the twelve.

Acts 2:23 (NASB)

this Man, **delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands** of godless men and put Him to death.

Acts 4:27-28 (NASB)

"For truly in this city there were gathered together against Thy holy servant Jesus, whom Thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, [28] **to do whatever Thy hand and Thy purpose predestined to occur.**

5. **God hardening the hearts of people to sin more and yet to accomplish His "larger" purposes. Pharaoh (Exo. 4:21, 8:1, 9:12, 10:20,27); Sihon King of Heshbon in Canaan (Deu. 2:26-30); Kings of Canaan to be conquered by Joshua and Israel (Jos. 11:19-20); even in Israel's hardening to bring about**

the salvation of all peoples and nations (Rom. 11:7-8, 25-26, 31-32; Mark 4:11-12,)

Exodus 4:21 (NASB)

And the Lord said to Moses, "When you go back to Egypt see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders which I have put in your power; but **I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go.**

Exodus 8:1 (NASB)

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go to Pharaoh and say to him, '**Thus says the Lord, "Let My people go, that they may serve Me.**

Exodus 9:12 (NASB)

And **the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart**, and he did not listen to them, just as the Lord had spoken to Moses.

Exodus 10:20, 27 (NASB)

But **the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart**, and he did not let the sons of Israel go.

[27] But **the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart**, and he was not willing to let them go.

Deut. 2:26-30 (NASB)

"So I sent messengers from the wilderness of Kedemoth to Sihon king of Heshbon with words of peace, saying, [27] 'Let me pass through your land, I will travel only on the highway; I will not turn aside to the right or to the left. [28] 'You will sell me food for money so that I may eat, and give me water for money so that I may drink, only let me pass through on foot, [29] just as the sons of Esau who live in Seir and the Moabites who live in Ar did for me, until I cross over the Jordan into the land which the Lord our God is giving to us.' [30] "But Sihon king of Heshbon was not willing for us to pass through his land; **for the Lord your God hardened his spirit and made his heart obstinate, in order to deliver him into your hand**, as he is today.

Joshua 11:19-20 (NASB)

There was not a city which made peace with the sons of Israel except the Hivites living in Gibeon; they took them all in battle. [20] **For it was of the Lord to harden their hearts, to meet Israel in battle in order that he might utterly destroy them, that they might receive no mercy, but that he might destroy them**, just as the Lord had commanded Moses.

Isaiah 42:18 (NASB)

Hear, you deaf! And look, you blind, that you may see.

Romans 11:7-8 (NASB)

What then? That which Israel is seeking for, it has not obtained, but those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened; [8] just as it is written, "God gave them a spirit of stupor, Eyes to see not and ears to hear not, Down to this very day."

Mark 1:15 (NASB)

and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

Romans 11:25-26 (NASB)

For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery, lest you be wise in your own estimation, that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fulness of the Gentiles has come in; [26] and thus all Israel will be saved;

Romans 10:1, 21 (NASB)

Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation. [21] But as for Israel He says, "All the day long I have stretched out My hands to a disobedient and obstinate people."

Romans 11:31-33 (NASB)

so these also now have been disobedient, in order that because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy. [32] For God has shut up all in disobedience that He might show mercy to all.

[33] Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!

6. God sometimes desiring to restrain evil and sin and sometimes not. Contrast the story of King Abimelech with Sarah (Gen. 20:6), and the story of the sons of Eli (1Sam. 2:22-25)

Genesis 20:6 (NASB)

Then God said to him in the dream, "Yes, I know that in the integrity of your heart you have done this, and I also kept you from sinning against Me; therefore **I did not let you touch her.**

1 Samuel 2:22-25 (NASB)

Now Eli was very old; and he heard all that his sons were doing to all Israel, and how they lay with the women who served at the doorway of the tent of meeting. [23] And he said to them, "**Why do you do such things, the evil things** that I hear from all these people? [24] "No, my sons; for the report is not good which I hear the Lord's people circulating. [25] "If one man sins against another, God will mediate for him; but if a man sins against the Lord, who can intercede for him?" But **they would not listen to the voice of their father, for the Lord desired to put them to death.**

NOTE: The same word used above for *desire* as used for *pleasure* in:

Ezekiel 18:23 (NASB)

"Do I have any **pleasure** in the death of the wicked," declares the Lord God, "rather than that he should turn from his ways and live?"

Ezekiel 18:32 (NASB)

"For I have no **pleasure** in the death of anyone who dies," declares the Lord God. "Therefore, repent and live."

Ezekiel 33:11 (NASB)

"Say to them, 'As I live!' declares the Lord God, 'I take no **pleasure** in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?'

SO, sometimes God *does not* take delight in the death of the wicked, and yet in some sense He *does!*

Deut. 28:63 (NASB)

"And it shall come about that as the Lord delighted over you to prosper you, and multiply you, so the Lord will delight over you to make you perish and destroy you; and you shall be torn from the land where you are entering to possess it.

1 Samuel 2:25 (NASB)

"If one man sins against another, God will mediate for him; but if a man sins against the Lord, who can intercede for him?" But they would not listen to the voice of their father, for the Lord desired to put them to death.

7. Basically this is the story of the Bible and God's plan through the ages:

- a. **Adam & Eve were commanded not to sin, and yet that was God's plan**
 - b. **The people were to live righteously in Noah's day, but God used their rebellion**
 - c. **The sin of Joseph's brothers was used in God's larger plan to use what they meant for evil for good.**
 - d. **Etc.**
- **Based upon above examples, consider the concepts of "sovereign will" or "will of decree" or "secret will" as contrasted to "moral will" or "will of command" or "revealed will." Does this mean that God has more than one will? Is He confused or conflicted?**
 - Examples from lives of George Washington and his death warrant issued for Major Andre; and from General Stonewall Jackson and a young VMI student who became a soldier (son of a pastor friend) from Pennsylvania that deserted.

The real issue is that God is God and we are not. Would we take more comfort in a God that we could understand? Isn't part of the power of the word its wonder? It is God's Word, not ours! If we understood everything, we would be equal to God!

Real faith is taking God at His word and believing it. Do we as children always understand our parents? Can we likewise trust God for that which He has told us but we still do not understand? There is such a rest and freedom in doing so!

Psalm 46:10 "**Cease striving and know that I am God**; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth."

- **The Question of WHY GOD?**

Do we have the right to question God Why? What are we doing when we move into this realm of questioning? (Getting into God's business!)

(Ex. of Job in Job 38:1-42:6)

Psalm 46:10 "Cease striving and know that I am God