

HOW SHALL I LOVE YOU, LORD ?

BY GRANT THORPE

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CONTENTS

	Page
<i>Introductory Note</i>	(vii)
<i>Preface</i>	(ix)
<i>Introduction: Love Includes Kindness and Commands</i>	
1	
<i>Chapter 1:</i> <i>God's Kindness - or Grace</i>	4
<i>Chapter 2:</i> <i>God's Commands - or Law</i>	8
<i>Chapter 3:</i> <i>The Special Role of Law</i>	16
<i>Chapter 4:</i> <i>Jesus Christ - The Meeting Point</i>	22
<i>Chapter 5:</i> <i>The Christian - Really Righteous</i>	30
<i>Chapter 6:</i> <i>Discover God's Kindness</i>	36
<i>Chapter 7:</i> <i>Willing Obedience</i>	41
<i>Chapter 8:</i> <i>Hungry for Righteousness</i>	48

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

Grant Thorpe - a Baptist minister and a Staff Worker with the Australian Fellowship of Evangelical Students - is an alert young man with theological sensitivity.

His sensitivity in theology has led him to the principle of practical application, i.e. no theology that does not relate to life.

In this book he discusses the age-old question of law and grace. The result? Not static theology but the warm way to love God and one's fellow creatures.

A book not only for the college student, but for us all.

The Publisher.

PREFACE

I hope that the title of this book and its subtitle have attracted the readers I have had in mind. Obviously, I would like to share my thoughts with those who want to love God, or with those who at least think that loving God is important. But I am also hoping that you are a person who is not satisfied with trite or piecemeal answers.

The book began as notes for a series of talks on the way Christians relate to God's grace and to his law. But that subject may seem to be merely theological, or remote. A far more passionate inquiry is involved in the discussion and this has become the title of the book: 'How shall I love you, Lord?'

Those who love God are those who have discovered that God is not only gracious, but that he is holy. They know that God's love toward them is not only patient and kind, but also does not delight in evil, always trusts, always hopes in them and for them (I Cor 13: 4-8). The way to love God is to discover his kindness, and to keep his commands.

I would like the book to have been simpler and I am sure that it could have been. But I am also sure that the issues themselves are not simple, and so I have found it necessary to refer to numerous parts of the Old and New Testaments, to discuss the way people relate to one another, and at times, to take issue with the way the church goes about its task of encouraging others to love God. But I hope that I will be able to convey how beautiful it is to love God, and how possible it is to love him, because of Christ.

INTRODUCTION

LOVE INCLUDES KINDNESS AND COMMANDS

‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind’. Jesus said this was the first and greatest commandment. To love anybody is a rich and demanding experience, so what is it like to love God? If he is our Maker and the great Lover of all that he has made, it must be the greatest occupation of all to be caught up in knowing and loving him.

So how can a person love God? Or, to put the question more personally: how shall I love you, Lord!’

Jesus showed us how to love God because he loved his Father with all his heart and soul and mind, and this involved two actions. First, he lived within the aura and experience of his Father’s goodness and had no doubts about his kindness and wisdom and power. Second, he expressed that trust in obedience. He sought out what his Father was doing and did all of the things that his Father wanted done. In fact, he did nothing other than that. So here is the answer to our question. Loving God is delighting in all his goodness, and obeying his commands.

Because our natures are sinful, love for God must take into account the matter of our basic rebellion towards God. -How shall we love him when the bent of our life is to disobedience? Where can we find the love which delights to obey him? Scripture says that we love because God first loved us, and this is the key to our theme. Those who find the kindness of God obey his commands.

The relationship between grace and law, God’s kindness and his commands, has been the subject of

constant inquiry since the coming of Christ, and well it might be. Jesus did something so radical in his coming to reveal the kindness of God that questions have arisen ever since as to what part commandments play in relating to God.

Actually no-one can avoid the debate in one form or another. Everyone who is interested in life and in love asks questions about grace and law. Let me mention just a few. Should we have expectations or set goals for our children, friends, or those for whom we have a responsibility? Can a relationship be sustained without mutual respect? Do we encourage moral laxity if forgiveness is too easily given? How does one encourage spontaneity in social groupings, churches, and in public life? What mixture of justice and mercy shall we use to combat social disorder? And more personal questions lurk beneath the surface. What basis do I have for self-esteem, achievement, or unconditional acceptance? What do I do when I feel inferior and cannot live up to my own expectations? How do I avoid bitterness when reality falls so far below my expectations?

Beneath all of these questions is the fundamental problem: what basis is there, morally, for being gracious to lawbreakers? If God is finally gracious, is there no justice? Not surprisingly, we will have to understand God's nature as revealed in the death of Christ in order to understand this. But because of the cross, Christians can live with confidence in God's grace, but also with delight in his law - and this is love for God. The questions raised above are not answered by reasoning things out so much as by coming to love the God who has given us his grace and his law.

In Micah 6: 8, the prophet says: 'He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?' From this, it is clear that we are to walk closely with a God who is equally concerned with right action and with kindness,

the God of grace and law. If we want to know God as he is, we will not be able to have grace apart from law or law apart from grace, but the two together in relationship.

The God of all the earth has never abandoned his plan to have his will done on earth as it is done in heaven. But it is clear that he is not going about enforcing obedience. Rather, he is revealing his grace. His plan is to win the obedience of the nations by his kindness so that his will is not done legalistically but in love. He waits patiently and works graciously. But his patience is not neglect, and his grace is not indulgence. His kindness will prevail and his commands will be kept and all causes of offence will be destroyed. The question of how I shall love God is a pressing one.

Some have erred by wanting a simplistic message, or one which is less demanding, and so have either overlooked the necessity of love or minimised the importance of obedience. They have either imagined God to be a benevolent being to whom obedience does not matter, or alternatively, become rigorous in their attempt to please an inscrutable judge and become harsh toward themselves and demanding on others. Neither group has found the way to love God, and as a consequence, neither group has a basis for lasting human relationships.

What we will need to find is not a balance between two extremes but rather an experience of God himself in his kindness, out of which flows an obedience to his commands. We are not dealing with concepts but with the reality of life, and with God himself.

CHAPTER ONE

GOD'S KINDNESS - OR GRACE

One of the most fundamental questions a person could ask is: 'May I approach God with confidence and be accepted by him?' Probably everyone asks that question, even if in some it is suppressed for fear of what the answer might be, i.e. either positive or negative. Suppose, for example, that God did accept me; what then would it be like to be loved by God? What changes or obligations would that involve? Or, suppose I approached God and was refused: what then? Isn't that a likely possibility? And would that not add to the shame I already feel - to be rejected when I sought acceptance?

Central to the Christian's faith is this, that he believes God exists and rewards those who earnestly seek him (Heb 11: 6). In other words, if I earnestly seek for God I will discover that he is gracious - and nothing else in all of life compares with making that discovery.

It is important to realise that the hindrances which prevent our discovery of the grace of God are not simple. Some of them may be due to lack of information, others may be social, and others personal. The information provided in this book seeks to remove the first of these hindrances. It also seeks to understand certain social pressures which confuse the issue. But by far the greatest problem is one for which you and I will have to accept responsibility, and that is, that we may have a vested interest in not needing God's kindness because that implies that we have failed or are weak. Jesus himself recognised that those who were 'well' did not need a 'doctor' He

saw too that people would need to become as children to enter the Kingdom. Those who are eager to know God are also anxious to know if he is gracious to those who seek him.

What indications are there then that God will be kind to those who come to him? I have used the word 'kind' because it is part of our common speech, but the Bible refers often to 'grace' in the New Testament, which has a broader and richer significance than 'kindness', and also to 'favour', 'covenant love', 'loving kindness', and 'mercy' and other related words in the Old Testament. But the words and the situations in which they occur, make it plain that everyone may seek God and find him because of the wideness and richness and persistence of his love.

Moses was the leader of Israel during the time of their coming to nationhood, and before he died, summarised what he had learned about God's relationship with them. 'The Lord set his affection on your forefathers and loved them, and he chose you, their descendants, above all the nations, as it is today. For the Lord your God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing' (Deut 10: 15-18; also 4:37, 7:7-8, 9:5-6). Moses knew that this favour was nothing to do with how impressive or virtuous the nation was, but only because of God's own love and his initiative in choosing them to receive his favour. On a number of occasions, the young nation of Israel showed that it was quite oblivious of who God was or how he had served them and provided for them. They became ungrateful, and forgetful of God's plans, and designed ways to live that suited themselves. Although these occasions were followed by judgements, God's sorrow and yearning for them was clearly revealed.

Literature from throughout Israel's history confirms that God's kindness or love was always the basis of the relationship he sought with his people (e. g.

Num 6:24-27, 2 Sam 7:15, Psa 31:21, 42:8). When God gave his commandments to Israel he began by affirming: 'I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery' (Exod 20: 2). So his commands were given against the background of his kindness. When the people sinned and could hardly be recognised as God's people, God could not bring himself to destroy them as they deserved. (For examples see Isaiah 43: 22-25, 48: 8-11, Ezekiel 36: 22-32, Hosea 11:8-10.) The prophet Micah wrote in his prophecy to Israel, 'Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry for ever but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl our iniquities into the depths of the sea. You will be true to Jacob, and show mercy to Abraham, as you pledged on oath to our fathers in days long ago' (Micah 7: 18-20). This last sentence makes it clear that God's kindness was not a passing whim but the settled basis of his relationship with Israel. And because of Israel's frequent wanderings from God's requirements, the grace of God was seen particularly in his forgiving of sin. (See Exodus 34: 6-7, Psalm 32: 1-5, Psalm 51, 103:8, Proverbs 3:34, Isaiah 30: 18.) In fact, a whole new covenant was promised to Israel which would be based on forgiveness. (See Jeremiah 31:31-34, Ezekiel 34:25.)

In the New Testament (or Covenant), the word 'grace' translates a Greek word '*charis*', meaning firstly gracefulness or loveliness. It has this particularly Greek meaning when applied to Christ's or the Christian's gracious speech (Luke 4:22, Col 4:6). But its characteristic meaning in the New Testament is graciousness, kindness, or favour, and especially of God's favour. The verb derived from '*charis*' means to give freely or 'to forgive freely'.

All that Israel discovered about God's kindness was reaffirmed by the coming of Jesus. But the clarity with which this happened left no doubts in the

minds of those who continued to follow Jesus that they could approach God with confidence regardless of their previous performance. The apostles themselves were possibly the best examples of this. They also received Christ's instruction that the good news of God's forgiveness was to be proclaimed everywhere in the world.

In chapter 4, I would like to return to the subject of how Christ revealed God's grace in history, but it is important at the outset to affirm that behind all things is a God who is gracious. There are many seemingly harsh elements in our world, particularly those that arise because of unforgiving tendencies between humans and the unyieldingness of their demands. So the truth about God's kindness is not apparent to human insight and at best is only faintly mirrored in the highest of human endeavour. But God has revealed his kindness to the world, a kindness which means that we can relate to him, not on the basis of our own goodness, but wholly on the basis of his goodness. If we are willing to receive his revelation, the whole world and its action can be viewed from a different perspective. Love for God will have given everything a different complexion.

CHAPTER TWO

GOD'S COMMANDS — OR LAW

I have raised the possibility of relationships that do not depend on performance, and particularly, a relationship with God which flows from his kindness rather than from our unsatisfactory attempts to earn his favour. But surely healthy relationships require that each party tries to bring pleasure to the other? Surely performance counts for something? And if we want to know God intimately, has he not given laws and commands to be obeyed? Are these optional, or do they bear on the relationship we have with God? It is generally thought that God's commands are his ten commandments given to Moses on Mt. Sinai. This is certainly the place where they are focused, but they must be seen in a wider context. God's law must be, at its most basic level, what God wants done, the right way to do things, or righteousness. God has never abandoned his plan for man to live righteously. Neither has his standard of righteousness altered. In I John 2:29 - 3:10, the writer shows that God's children are those who do what is right. He says that sin is lawlessness, so righteousness must be keeping the law or the commandments of God. The manner in which this comes about is something to which we must return, but for now we need to understand the nature of God's commands.

Our tendency is to feel that commands lessen our freedoms. However, the law given to Moses had no such connotation, certainly not from God's point of view. Listen to Moses summarising the giving of the law: 'And now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk

in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to observe the Lord's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good?' This, and the words that follow in the rest of the chapter, make it very clear that the commands were not authoritarian requirements, or even the basis of the relationship which God had with his people. The relationship was settled by God's own choice of and love for Israel, and the commands were the way in which that relationship was to be worked out.

We should be able to presume that if the people God made in his own likeness were saved from slavery (as Israel had been) so as to serve God, they would be glad to know how things were to be arranged. This seems to be the expectation of God at the time of the giving of the law (Exodus 24). In many ways, the nature of the Old Testament law reflects this expectation that people will be grateful to God, and so eager to do as he tells them.

Human relationships tend to be based on the satisfactory performance of each of the parties toward one another and therefore we may find it hard to understand a relationship which arises wholly from the love of one party, but which, nonetheless, calls the other party on to certain obligations. But it is vital that we see law in this light or our understanding will be less than Biblical.

God's relationship to Israel was fatherly. He had called them his 'first born son'. In one sense this was not new because the famous Hammurabi (c. 1792-1750 B. C.), whose code of law had many excellent aspects, was depicted as a shepherd and father of his people. But in Israel's case, the God of all the earth had chosen to relate to Israel as a father and therefore his commands had a warmth which should have been hard to ignore (Isa 1:2, Mal 1:6). They reflected the Father's concern that things go well for his family. For example: 'Honour your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your

God is giving you' (Exod 20:12; cf. Mark 2:27). Authority is not meant to be exercised for the benefit of the one in command, but for the sake of others, and so as to bring about the goals determined for the good of all. If this is the way God gives his commands, there are implications for the way parents should relate to their children, and how authorities in society should relate to those under them. Inasmuch as any authority does not do this, it twists life into false forms and make the understanding of God's law more difficult to grasp. It follows too, that education for life is essentially a family matter, and an extension of that principle into the wider community. Caring for and providing for people should precede making laws for them. Those who through grace come to understand God's law, are equipped to begin the difficult but necessary task of looking at all the matters relating to those for whom they have responsibility, thinking through how things could be best arranged for all, and creating structures where necessary, in which others can live freely. One can understand that if Israel had lived by its law, it would have been 'their wisdom' in the sight of all the nations who encountered their manner of life (Deut 4: 6).

In the New Testament, Paul said that God's law was 'spiritual' (Rom 7: 14), and this, in part, must mean that law is not a thing, an impersonal standard, but the fleshing out of a relationship. Law should not lead to a form of conduct so much as to a person. God's law is relational also in that it is meant to enhance the ability of people to live in harmony with each other, with emphasis on community benefit rather than individual rights. In other words, God's commands are not intended to guard some supposed right to freedom from intrusion, but to regulate the necessary interplay of persons involved in living. In fact, the Old Testament law required persons to perform their obligations to others freely! An example of this occurs in Deuteronomy 15: 12-18. A Hebrew slave-owner was required to release his slave after six years

of service and to liberally supply him with goods from his threshing-floor, his flock, and his wine-press. He was to remember that he was a slave in Egypt once, and had been set free by God. Most interestingly, God commanded: 'Do not consider it a hardship to set your servant free... '.

Some may feel, because of certain cultural factors, that all authority has to do with force. If this is so, it is necessary to unlearn this 'vain tradition inherited from our elders', and see the true intention of law. In human terms, one can appreciate how hard it is for people of all cultures to view God's authority as benevolent, partly because of the human perversions of authority under which we live, but more so, because of our rejection of the Person behind all true law. If one is truly reconciled to God, obeying his commands is not burdensome.

God's law was never intended to be impossibly hard, requiring ascetic and burdensome application, but was '...very near you in your mouth and in your heart so that you may obey it' (Deut 30:11-14; also I John 5:3). This clearly required that persons understand the love behind the law, because, apart from that, it only appeared harsh and unattainable. One of the psalmists, during an experience of chastening, came to understand that although he loved God's law, he would only run in that way when his understanding was enlarged (Psa 119:32, 34, 35).

The law prescribed a sentence for those who broke it: a curse would fall on any who disobeyed; but blessing would come to all who kept it (Gen 2: 17, Deut 30:15-20; also Rom 6:23, Heb 2:2, 10:28-31, James 1: 15). The Old Testament abounds with examples of God's judgements which came upon Israel because the law was broken, and in a wider sense the principle extends to all nations: 'Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people' (Prov 14:34). It is only by God's wisdom that kings or princes reign and make laws that are just and so have 'enduring prosperity' (Prov 8: 15-18). In his love for

the world, God gives wisdom even to those who do not yet acknowledge him. But the security of their kingdoms is greatly limited if they do not seek the source of that wisdom. If it ever became true as a general principle that wickedness cause people to prosper, then there could be no order in the world or confidence for the future. There could be no expectation of justice or hope for reward for one's labours. Fatalism would rule. Biblically, the reason why the wicked are permitted to prosper for a short while could only be that God in his kindness is calling them to repentance (Rom 2: 4), or that he has some other temporary purpose in view. Apart from that, their fall is inevitable (Psalm 1, 11, 14, 15, 37, and many others, but especially 73:17-20. Also Proverbs, especially chapter 11).

So righteousness remains the way to live, and justice will finally be done. But from every point of view, the law or commands of God, do not fit the Biblical revelation unless we see that they arise from the kindness or grace of God. When someone disobeys the command of God, they are not immediately in the presence of judgement, but rather in the presence of the grace which stands behind the commandment. For example, when Cain failed to please God, he found he was in the presence of grace, calling him to repentance and so to acceptance (Gen 4: 1-7). It seems that since the fall of man and the judgement that followed, there have been no occurrences where judgement followed hard upon the breaking of the law. Rather, law-breaking led one into the presence of grace, and judgement came because grace was ignored rather than because the law was broken. Examples of this can be seen throughout the Old Testament and certainly the New Testament. (See II Samuel 12:13, Psalm 99:8, Proverbs 28:13, Jeremiah 31:30-34, Ezekiel 18, especially verses 21-24, 33:8-27, Micah 7:18.) Wherever God's grace is ignored, his judgements are unrelenting. The law is in full operation. This is as true in the New Testament as in the Old Testament (Matt 11: 20-24, John 3:18, 36, 8:21-24, Heb 10:28-31).

We now need to see how God's commands were abused and took on a different character from the one God intended. The misuse of law began with questioning. If we think of law in its widest sense of what God wants done, this questioning began in the garden of Eden: 'Has God said?'. This kind of questioning could only be sustained by questioning the goodness of God. Sin appears to have at its very root the refusal of persons to live as dependent, obedient creatures, and so not to have God in their thinking. When the law had been given, people, in the first instance, could only abuse it by removing it from the covenant of grace of which it was a part, and making the law an entity in itself. One could think of it as a humanised law which people could use as they willed in order to relate with God. The New Testament shows how preposterous this notion was: autonomous man would be hostile to God, not subject to him (Rom 8:7). Nonetheless, by wrenching law from its context, man could more readily suit the law to his rebellious tastes. Paul said Israel did not pursue its law with faith (Rom 9:31-32), that is, faith in God's grace (so Heb 11: 6).

Most obviously, man abused law by disobeying it, and then rationalised his failure with various excuses (Rom 2: 17-24). This happened from the time of the law's promulgation on Sinai: the people of Israel were busy making a golden calf while Moses received the tablets of stone. If people preferred not to receive the chastenings and forgiveness that followed, their only recourse was to further pervert the law.

Because Israel had broken the law and the law was working in their consciences, Israel needed to limit its scope and so lessen the hurt. This was done by codifying and re-defining the law so that it was more 'manageable'. This had been done extensively by the time of Christ's coming (Matt 23, Mark 7: 1-23, Luke 6:6-11, John 7:19-24, 47-53). Paul warned Christians not to become involved in the practice of useless arguments about such a process (Titus 3:9).

The law became completely externalised instead of a guide to reality (Rom 2:28-29).

The regulating of law had been done so ‘successfully’, that some could glory in that to which they were basically hostile (Rom 2: 17). Their so-called obedience became a ceremony in its own right (Isa 29: 13, Matt 23: 5-7), and whereby they could better their image in the eyes of their peers.

Law came to be equated with culture or the ‘status quo’ by the leaders of Israel. This gave the abuse of law a dignity which enabled an indignant Jewry to crucify their Messiah (John 19:7; also Acts 21:17-18, 23: 29). (This does not mean however that where God’s law is reasonably represented by local custom that it needs to be despised; see Acts 22:12, 23:3-5.)

Most hideously, law was thought of as a way whereby one could establish credibility with God; hideous, not because the idea is a bad one, but because the possibility is zero, and men could be offering to God as a beautiful thing what were basically rags. From the beginning, people have only ever been justified by faith (Heb 11: 1-2), that is, faith in God’s kindness and grace. This point ought to have been clear by the time of the coming of the Messiah and all Israel ought to have gratefully submitted to the baptism of repentance conducted by John the Baptist. But all through the time of the ministry of Christ and the apostles, this point had to be reaffirmed, and will always have to be reaffirmed. (See Acts 15:5, 10-11, Romans 3:20-21, 9:30-32, 10:3-6, Galatians 2: 16, 18-21.)

The church is to beware of imbibing Israel’s error and, subsequently to discovering the grace of Christ, using law as a means of developing holiness (Gal 2: 16-21, 3: 1-5). We must look at this more closely later.

If we understand now that God’s commands all come from and are administered from the perspective of his kindness, we should be stirred to seek this God who is gracious because it is only in knowing his kindness

that we will keep his commands in the manner he requires. Those who do not actually encounter such a God will never really turn from their sin and will continue to trifle, debate, and defer in regard to what God wants done. Their whole life will beat out the fact that they don't know God. So actually the ultimate command of God is that men turn and believe the good news concerning his grace and forgiveness (Acts 2:40).

I have concentrated mostly, to this point, on Biblical material up to the time of Christ's coming, but already it should be plain that it would be impossible for God's law to pass away. His commands describe for us the things he wants done, and if this were not finally done willingly by the race he created, there could be no justification for the making of man, nor any relationship with God that had any dignity. Nor, in fact, any god worth speaking of. But Jesus said the law would be fulfilled (Matt 5:17-18, 7:12, 22:36-40), and Paul showed how this came to be so (Acts 25: 8-10, Rom 3:31, 13:8-10, Gal 5:14). The God whom we come to know through grace does not make us stand ashamed in his presence as those who could bring him no joy. Those who know him, love him, and they delight to do his will.

CHAPTER THREE

THE SPECIAL ROLE OF LAW

God does not 'grow up' or change from one era to another. His manner of working has varied through history so as to fully reveal himself to man, but each new revelation has been cumulative so that what was new could be received because of what went before, and what had gone before could be understood because of what was new. So God was not a God of laws and commands in the Old Testament and a God of kindness and grace in the New Testament, but a God of kindness and commands in both. Under both covenants, law is what God wants done, and both are covenants of grace.

The apostle John does say that 'the law was given through Moses: grace and truth came through Jesus Christ' (John 1:17). This does not mean however that there was no law before Moses or no grace before Christ, but that the law was formally proclaimed at Mt. Sinai, and grace was fully revealed by the coming of Christ. It will be helpful to see this in closer detail, first in regard to law and then in regard to grace.

In the very beginning of man's history, instructions were given regulating marriage, work, and the sabbath (Gen 1:26-28, 2:3, 15). This creational law was never revoked; Jesus and Paul both referred to it as authoritative (Matt 19:8, I Cor 11:7-8). Abraham obeyed God's voice, and also kept God's commandments, statutes and laws (Gen 26: 15). The law of God has always been and has always applied to all peoples. Paul showed that this was true when he wrote to the Romans: people died because of sin from the beginning,

and sin is not measurable unless there is a law to break - so God's law must have been from the beginning (Rom 5: 12-14). The ten commandments were not the origins of God's law. What did happen when Moses received the stone tablets from God was that the commandments were given to Israel as a people (Rom 3:1-3), proclaiming to the world that their relationship to God was a responsible one (Exod 19: 5-9), including not only the actions of God, but the willing response of the people (Exod 24:3-8). Their duty was to sanctify God's name among the nations by worshipping the true God exclusively and spiritually, and to reflect the character of God ethically. So the law was formally proclaimed as part of the covenant governing the relation between God and the people, giving that relationship a new dignity.

The question arises: Why did God give Israel his law and tell them that this was the way of life, when in fact it already had a track record of leading people to death? There could be no questioning that the law was good, but no one had ever kept the law to the perfection required in order to avoid the penalty of death. The answer must lie in the following considerations. Firstly, one cannot imagine a holy God formalising a relationship with a people without requiring moral responsibility from them. Secondly, this requirement was only part of the covenant; it also included a whole sacrificial cultus which took into full account the sinfulness of the people and still gave them a way to approach God - he would forgive their sin. Thirdly, because the commands of God arose from his kindness and grace, their purpose must always have been to draw attention to that and lead to that.

Through an experience of the kindness and grace of God the apostle Paul came to see the true nature of law and its purpose in Israel's history. He said: 'We were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.'

Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law' (Gal 3:23-25). Of course, there were always those who lived in glad expectation of the full revelation of grace, but law, historically, was in charge.

Then in the New Testament era, Paul said: 'the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men' (Titus 2: 11). In Jesus Christ, the grace and kindness of God was physically and totally present among men, and was revealed fully in his actions, death, and resurrection. No one could have imagined the workings or the extent of God's kindness until Christ came - not even angelic creatures (Ephes 3: 10).

The grace of Christ had been predicted and searched out as far as that was possible by the Old Testament prophets (I Peter 1:10-12). The documents containing the law had testified to Christ (Acts 24: 14-15, 28:23). Grace was present to them in the promise of salvation, in forgiveness of sins, in deliverance from their enemies, and in the whole covenantal relationship between God and the people. David had known that if God washed him from his sin, he would be whiter than snow (Psalm 51). Isaiah had known that God was the Father of Israel and that he could appeal to him although all national identity was lost (Isaiah 63: 16). These revelations were incredible, but none of them compared with the scope and intensity and finality of grace as it was revealed in Christ. They lived with the shadows and experienced God's grace, but wondered still how it was that God was to be gracious. Their experience was real, but only the experience of what was still a promise.

The appearing of Christ will be the special study of chapter 4, but there is another aspect of law to look at first, particularly regarding the Gentiles. It is important to see that all peoples, and not just Israel, have been, and are under God's law and its penalties. Because the law was formally promulgated with Israel, their case is clearer. But there is a moral

law which asserts in each person's conscience that if he does well he will be rewarded and if he does not then he will be punished (Romans 2:6-11). The form of that law may not always be clearly formulated as in Israel's case, but it is present and playing a dynamic role in every person and society. * The effects of law-breaking (viz., death) have fallen on all men (Rom 5: 12-14) so in fact the whole world is irretrievably wedded to law until the gospel comes (cf. Rom 7: 1-4, Gal 3:22-25). And of course, if people reject the good news of God's kindness, they remain under the control of law, and, in fact, under the bondage of law, because any approach to law not grounded in God's kindness is an imprisonment (Rom 9: 32).

Everywhere in the world, people have personal values and make moral judgements. Even in a structure which claims to be pluralistic, these values and judgements affect relationships with others because no one can totally isolate himself from others either physically or in regard to what he really believes. Therefore, in all societies, standards are set, expectations are conveyed, either plainly or by inference, and public laws may be proclaimed to regulate the society and encourage harmonious living. From another perspective, various rights are claimed and even fought for. These laws or claims may be made to suit a majority or a minority. They may be just or unjust, but they will be made. If a society does not do this of itself, it will be forced to take action by the disorder which results. All of this reflects the fact that we live in a moral universe in which one cannot escape from being under some expression of law.

However, the fact that all are under the power of God's law has even more personal and social consequences.

* Harper Lee in his novel, *To Kill a Mocking Bird*, has the lawyer Atticus say of the guilty Mayella: 'No code mattered to her before she broke it, but it came crashing down on her afterwards' (p. 208).

On the one hand, all people know there are things they should do and that there are things that should be done for them. But because everyone fails to meet those requirements, the real presence of God's moral law makes people feel guilt for what they have done and a sense of injustice concerning what has been done to them.

Deficiencies seem to abound both within ourselves and around us, and so all manner of rationalisations, accusations, self-improvements, and social reforms, and many other things become necessary. And because faults and failings continue to occur, we need to consider whether or not we will forgive ourselves, and the world, for the many perversions. How much can be forgiven? Who will forgive who and on what premise? Then it also becomes a question as to whether passing over faults gives one any self-respect or encourages moral responsibility in others. How is it possible for a person to enjoy the warmth of a secure acceptance anywhere, when inwardly one knows that the acceptance is not justified? And how can one go on showing favour to those who continue to sin? For lack of solid answers to these questions human behaviour tends to wobble from the side of harshness to the other of moral flabbiness. Those who are experiencing guilt and do not know the kindness and the commands of God as a practical experience of life must be unable to find the answer to these questions by themselves. What is needed is not the balance of two extremes, but the truth of God himself being worked out in human affairs. Those who do not have this must walk the treadmill of attaining either self-acceptance, or the acceptance of others with, of course, unsatisfactory results. The requirements of God's law are unrelenting and we are only reminded of our inability to perform as we should.

The Bible refers to those without Christ as being the objects or children of wrath (Ephes 2: 3). They know God's righteous decree that those who do wrong deserve death (Rom 1:32). The 'knowing' in question

here does not need to be acknowledged or conscious to be effective. The dynamics of guilt and condemnation and fear of retribution are universal. People are in bondage. That is, they cannot act freely - because of the fear of death (Heb 2:14-15). This fear is probably not simply the fear that physical life will cease, but the fear that judgement must follow. Paul said that 'the sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law' (I Cor 15: 56). John the apostle said that 'fear has to do with punishment' (I John 4: 18). Everyone experiences the threat of wrath unless he knows the grace of God.

So God's law applies to all people and all have an experience of law. The experience ought to be one of delight but in fact because of sin it is damning. It is also inescapable. The whole of humanity is locked into the fact that they and the world should be righteous, and that they are not, and that they are answerable for the defect. This has always been the action of law. However, the purpose of that action has always been to shepherd people towards the grace of God. Like physical pain which alerts us to the presence of disease, guilt, which law was sent to arouse, makes us aware of moral and spiritual disorder, and of the need to find someone to save us.

CHAPTER FOUR

JESUS CHRIST—THE MEETING POINT

Everyone needs to know God. That is the reason for our presence on this planet and the explanation of our many aspirations and turmoils. Mankind was not meant for anything small. To know God is to receive his favour (grace) and to do the things he wants done (laws). People who know God have all they could need.

Many try to sublimate this need to know God with human alternatives, but they can never fulfil their aspirations or dismiss their turmoils. Such appear in new forms. In various ways, societies and families try to find a right mixture of tolerance and demand, freedom and structure. Individuals try to find an identity, partly related to their performance, but because this is always deficient, it requires graciousness on the part of those to whom they relate.

The dilemma of those who seek to live without God and without his Christ is that they can never bring the components of grace and law together without confusion, compromise, imbalance and inconsistency. It is not an academic problem, but a personal and moral one. How does one forgive oneself without losing a sense of dignity and moral responsibility? Can anyone freely forgive others in the uninhibited way that God does? What basis is there anyway, for being gracious to law-breakers? We could easily despair or become bitter with life if it were not for the coming of Christ.

God himself is the only one in whom grace and law hold naturally together. Jesus Christ is the one who has, in our history, made them fully known. Because of him, Christians can live in grace and in law, not as

concepts, but as realities of the life of God in which they share. So Jesus is the meeting point of grace and law, and for us sinners, he is our meeting point with God. Because this is vital for our whole life, we will look now at how Christ has fully disclosed God's grace, and fully established God's law.

Jesus was a man filled with grace and this showed in both his words and actions (Luke 4:22, John 1:14). He healed the sick and fed the hungry and received the outcasts. A leper said to Jesus: 'If you are willing, you can make me clean.' This seemed to stir Jesus deeply because the narrative continues by saying that Jesus was filled with compassion, touched the man, and said, 'I am willing - be clean!' (Mark 1: 40-42). Those whose faith was aroused by what they saw and heard of Jesus and sought his aid, found that he possessed vast resources of compassion. On another occasion, in the context of an extensive speaking and healing ministry, it is recorded that 'When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd' (Matt 9:35-38).

The reason why the Jews of Jesus' day were harassed and helpless seems to be related to the lack of expectation the people had that God would do anything for them. Jesus struggled with the low ebb of faith which he found in Israel and was sometimes exasperated by it (Matt 8: 10, 26). The people's faith in God was a shrivelled version of what it should have been. Even a man like Zechariah (the father of John the Baptist) who was 'upright in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commandments and regulations blamelessly', could not believe the word of God to him that his wife would bear a child in her old age, and was severely rebuked for his unbelief. Faith is vital because it raises the issue of the character of God 'Is he a gracious God?'

Undoubtedly the Pharisaic teaching of the day had not helped. The teachers of the law had made law-keeping a burdensome matter (Luke 11:46) and in the

process made God seem to be niggardly and demanding instead of gracious. Jesus told those who were wearied in this way, to come to him and find rest for their souls. He said his yoke was easy and his burden was light (Matt 11:28-30). In many such ways, Jesus sought to re-establish faith in the grace of God. He said: 'Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?' (Matt 6:26).

The very presence of Jesus with men would have been grace, but through the dullness created by sin, men were slow to see that or did not see it at all (John 1: 11, 14, 17). We all have a habit of presuming that kindnesses are our right (or reward) rather than the reaching of God's grace to us (Rom 2:4).

But Jesus portrayed grace in a more obvious manner by associating with and forgiving those who were obvious sinners (Mark 2:5, Luke 7:48, John 8: 11). This focused the unmerited nature of grace, both for those who received it and those who objected to it. For Jesus, this was not careless giving away of the favours of another - he was personally involved in the revealing of this grace. He gave himself to people at the expense of his own necessities (Mark 3: 9-10, 19-21), even though people misunderstood and misused his favours (Mark 1:40-45, John 6:15, 26-27, Mark 20: 20-21). He explained that all sins, except rejecting the ministry of the Spirit, could be forgiven, including sins against himself (Matt 12:31-32).

Jesus fulfilled this claim literally in the hours leading up to his death. He told Peter of his coming failure and what to do after he was converted (Luke 22:31-34). He gave the mark of honour to the one who would betray him (John 13:21-26). Peter recalls that Jesus was reviled but did not return the hatred, and suffered, but did not threaten (I Peter 2:23). As the logical consequence of being gracious to sinners, he bore all their hatred with love, and died, the just for the unjust (I Peter 3:18). Even at his execution, he

cared more for the well-being of the souls of the soldiers than for the injustice of what was happening to himself (Luke 23:34). When he rose from death, he immediately gave instructions concerning his ‘brethren’ (Matt 28: 10) - those, in fact, who had all forsaken him in his trials. Therefore, when Paul says that God has demonstrated his love for us in that Christ died for us when we were sinners, he is not stating a mere churchly creed, but a fact which even a hardened mind would find hard to ignore. God has literally proved or established the fact of his grace within our history (Rom 5:6-8). Being in the bosom of his Father, Jesus knew how important it was for God to show his grace to men and women. His own relationship with his Father flowed richly with that grace, and he wanted others to share that relationship. Before proceeding any further with Christ’s revelation of God’s grace, we will trace the manner in which he fulfilled the law, and how this also relates to his, and our, loving the Father.

Without question, Jesus was a righteous man; he kept the law. He was not interested in pedantic attention to outward forms as the Pharisees were, and taught that one’s righteousness would have to exceed theirs in order to have eternal life. He explained that the law required a correct motive and intention as well as action (Matt 5:21-48). He taught that none of the law would pass away but would all be fulfilled; that those who did and taught the law would be called great in the kingdom of heaven and those who did not, least in the kingdom (Matt 5: 17-20).

Jesus also said that love was the fulfilment of the law - love for God and one’s neighbour (Matt 22:34-40, Mark 12:28-34, Deut 6:4-5). The questioner who asked which was the greatest commandment and agreed with Jesus’ answer was told: ‘You are not far from the kingdom of God.’ In seeing that the law was fulfilled by love, he had come close to a full-orbed relationship with God. To another man, Jesus said that if he

wanted to 'enter life' he would need to 'obey the commandments' (Matt 19: 17). Clearly, in all that Jesus would do to establish grace in the earth, he was not about to dis-establish law or vary any fixed points of reference. At the close of the age, he taught, angels would separate the evil from the righteous and throw the evil into a furnace (Matt 13:47-50).

Righteousness for Jesus must have been an exhilarating experience. He said, 'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled' (Matt 5: 6). He must have been speaking out of his own experience of the happiness of being filled with righteousness. Greatest in this happiness would have been the joy of doing what his Father told him to do (John 8: 29), and the profound delight of knowing that his Father was satisfied. The Father broke the silence of eternity twice to audibly declare that his Son was well-pleasing to him (Matt 3:17, 17:5). Jesus had kept the law in all respects and to its very depth to the complete satisfaction of his Father (cf. James 2: 10-12).

This demonstration of living in law and grace before the Father, while being truly remarkable, is still distant from us - it has not touched all of our need. So the grace of God proceeds still further to fulfil the law !

Jesus asked John the Baptist to baptise him 'to fulfil all righteousness' (Matt 3: 15). On the surface, it did not appear necessary for Christ to be baptised, but Christ certainly understood it to be part of righteousness. Which law was it, that required a righteous man to identify himself with unrighteous people? The necessity seems to arise from the fact that Christ had come 'in the likeness of sinful man' (Rom 8:3). He was not a sinner, but was a brother to those who were (Heb 2: 11, 14). The meaning of being human includes the need to be a helper of other humans. That had been God's intention from the beginning as shown by Cain's guilty question: 'Am I my brother's keeper?' (Gen 4:9). Joseph and Moses and Esther (among many

others) had all seen that their position in life made it necessary for them to identify with their brothers in need. On the occasion of his baptism, Jesus formally identified with those who, as sinners, longed for the grace of God promised by John the Baptist. Then, throughout his ministry, he maintained that position.

So the gracious act of Jesus in formally and practically identifying with sinners was spoken of in terms of fulfilling righteousness, i.e. law. In the same vein, Jesus said that his Father's 'commandment' was eternal life (John 12:49-50, cf. 10:17-18, 15:10. See also Luke 22:39-46, I Tim 6:14). Paul must also have sensed this when he said, 'I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!' (I Cor 9: 16). For Jesus, law had no dread. To obey a command did not destroy the freedom of his actions. Law was not rendered 'powerless' because of a sinful nature for him, and could be the basis of his action without any conflict with grace. He knew that law was embedded in God's grace, and in fact was an expression of grace and so he could obey it freely.

It seems that Jesus could do no other than identify with repentant sinners. But this does not mean that sinners can say - 'He had to save us!' Grace does not arise out of law, but law out of grace. God is not locked into having to save us, but is free in his grace to act as he wills (Rom 9: 14-16). But if grace issues a command, then it is righteousness to let that grace flow freely by obeying the command.

We remind ourselves now that Jesus was born under the law--specifically, the law given to Moses, which drew attention to grace very definitely, but still in ways which made men long to know it clearly; they had shadows and promise and hope. The provisions of the law were not satisfied as yet, even though Old Testament men rejoiced in being cleansed of their sin. People with understanding must have realised that God had 'left the sins committed beforehand unpunished' (Rom 3: 25). Sacrificial lambs had been offered as God required, but these could only be

tokens of what was to come; ‘It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins’ (Heb 10: 4). When Jesus came, however, John the Baptist introduced him as ‘the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world’ (John 1:29).

Jesus was the Lamb chosen by God for finally dealing with sin. ‘The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all (Isa 53:6). Paul says: ‘God made him who had no sin to be sin for us (II Cor 5:21). Christ became the guilty and punishable one, as though he broken the law. He became the cursed one instead of the blessed one because those who kept the law were blessed and those who broke it were cursed (Deut 27: 26, 28:1-6, Gal 3:10, 24). If Christ had only borne the punishment for our sins before bearing sin itself, judgement would have been unjust, and Christians would live with the uncertain benefit of feeling that the wrong man died.

When we have fully fathomed Christ’s bearing of our sins, we will have fully fathomed love itself. We may say that, God has taken our part against himself ‘God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them’ (II Cor 5: 19). But he was counting them - against his Son. Law requires that law-breakers be appropriately rewarded: God’s wrath is revealed from heaven against all wickedness of men who suppress truth (Rom 1: 18-20); those who break the law, bear God’s curse (Deut 27: 26, Gal 3: 10); all the condemnation of law applies to them (Rom 3:5f, Col 2: 14). If this were not so, then people would not learn righteousness (Isa 26: 7-10), there could be no basis for moral order (Prov 14: 34, 17: 15), because God would have been shown to be without will or power to rectify the aberrations within his creation.

This is not a study on judgement, but I suggest that finally, all people will see how beautiful God’s judgements are. If he did not hedge the human race about with all manner of reminders of the awfulness of sin, how much more horrific would human history have

been? We certainly see the beauty of judgement when we see it in the cross. This act has become the symbol of love and devotion wherever the Christian message has penetrated. Christians glory in the cross, and rightfully so. But it was first an act of judgement. The due and rightful processes of law could not be waived because it was Jesus who ‘became sin’. He bore all the sin of all the race, and all the judgement of God on all the race, once for all. This is conveyed in the term ‘propitiation’, meaning, to turn away or appease, wrath (Rom 3:21-26, I John 2:1-2). One does not need to equate wrath with vindictiveness or human passion raging out of control. In fact, it is the very love of God moving to destroy all that has perverted man, and simultaneously, opening a way for man to approach him without dread of punishment (I John 4:17-19). Here, God’s grace and law are not concepts somehow related in the church’s creeds, but realities we can share and enjoy because they have been established in one act of love, by a human being.

The resurrection completes the revelation. Jesus was not raised for his own benefit or to prove himself anymore than he was crucified for those reasons. He was ‘raised for our justification’ (Rom 4:25). The next chapter will seek to show how law and grace are fulfilled in the justification of those who are united with Christ, and so how they come to know God and love him.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE CHRISTIAN—REALLY RIGHTEOUS

If you or I want to know God, our consciences tell us that we must not only relate to his kindness but also to his commands. How can two persons sustain a relationship if they maintain different views as to what is right and good?

One of Israel's psalmists said: 'Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false. He will receive blessing from the Lord and vindication from God his Saviour (Psa 24:3-5). Jesus agreed with the psalmist. He said: 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God' (Matt 5: 8').

Jesus himself was justified by works - he always did what pleased the Father. He would have known that the only way for people to enjoy the presence of God would be for them to be righteous. During his ministry he promised that those who hungered for righteousness would be filled, i.e. with righteousness (Matt 5: 6). Then, by his death and resurrection, he saw to it that 'the righteous requirements of the law' were 'fully met in us who...live...according to the Spirit' (Rom 8:4).

Law would have been destroyed and chaos would reign forever, if it could have been shown that the favour of God was attainable without regard to law. Only the righteous can enter the kingdom of God and the unrighteous can never have true life. How is it then, that the righteous requirements of the law are fully met in us?

The apostle Paul said that we 'died with Christ'.

God sent Christ to be the representative for all men, so we were included in his death (II Cor 5: 14). To sin is to be worthy of death. But now that Jesus has died in our place, that death does not need to be experienced any more. Neither does its fear. Because Jesus is alive, we also are alive to God - in him (Rom 6:1-11). Paul said: 'I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me' (Gal 2: 20). He was showing that the only way to be righteous or justified before God was by being included in the death of Christ, and in his resurrection.

God could not accept a law-breaker and never will (Prov 17: 15, Rev 21:27), so it is essential to acknowledge that the rightful penalty for our wrongs fell on Christ and that we can only stand before God in him. Nailed to the cross, in effect, were all the accusations of law which stood against us (Col 2: 14), and because of those accusations, Christ died. Now that he is alive again, those accusations cannot be renewed. The law only acts against a person while he lives, Paul reasons (Rom 7: 1-4). So Christ is free in his resurrection to establish a whole new humanity based on his own indestructible life and proven righteousness (Acts 2:24, 31, Heb 7:16).

There is no other righteousness on earth really, other than the righteousness of Christ. No one else has ever kept all of the law in its true intent all of his life so as to bring pleasure to the Father. Our righteousness is like filthy rags (Isa 64:6). But Christ's righteousness could not even be destroyed by the experience of bearing our sin and its penalty. His triumph was declared by the resurrection. Therefore, in his name, God gives the gift of righteousness to all who believe (Rom 3:22, 5:16, 10:3-4, 2 Cor 5:21, Phil 3:8-9, Col 1:22). Christ is our righteousness (I Cor 1: 30). We have come to fullness of life in him, and this could only be a life of righteousness (Col 2: 10, 13).

The precise meaning of being credited with the righteousness of God may always evade us, but from

the point of view of practical living, it is enough to know that God has given us the gift of righteousness, and accepts us totally because of Christ - especially because of the act of obedience or righteousness which he performed in his death (Rom 5: 18-19). God does not look at us and call clean what is unclean, but looks at us in his Son and sees a new creation; 'the old has gone, the new has come' (II Cor 5: 17). It is not important to know how we have changed inwardly so much as to know how differently we are regarded by God.

I am wary of becoming wearisome with explanations. The fact is that if you are holding out hopes of being justified before God in your own right, any explanation will be too long, and if you long for the righteousness whereby you can stand confidently before God, much explanation is probably not necessary. Christ saw our plight and plunged into the abyss of our judgement. Having borne this to its end, he is free to say to us - 'You are freed (justified) from your sin' (Rom 6: 7). We need to acknowledge the rightness of his death for us, and live in his resurrection (Rom 6:11).

To be justified is to be upheld as righteous in God's sight and so to be protected and blessed accordingly (Isa 45:24-25, Rom 5:1-5, 8:33-35). All of the Father's favour which Christ enjoyed in his earthly life, the sureness of his prayers being heard (John 16:23-24), and the confidence that his Father was responsible for him (John 19: 10-11), are ours as well. He has won for us and given to us the glory which was his by right (John 17:20-23, Ephes 1:6, 3:12), including finally, a bodily resurrection because of righteousness (Rom 8: 10-11).

One more thing needs to be very clear. Because Christ has been through judgement and returned, the righteousness we have in him cannot be altered by our failings. John wrote about the necessity of acknowledging sin, but he said: 'I write this to you so that you will not sin, but if anybody does sin, we have one

who speaks to the Father in our defence - Jesus Christ, the Righteous One' (I John 2: 1). Therefore each new moment is clean, unspotted by past failures. We are kept as new-born, bearing no blame. While we walk in this faith, Satan is unable to sting us with his accusations (Ephes 6: 16). Nor can people berate us (effectively) concerning our incompetence (I Cor 4:3-5). The charges may all be true and have grave social consequences, but they cannot interfere with the covenant of peace God has made with us (cf. David's experience - II Samuel 12: 13-14). 'Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns?' (Rom 8:33-34). We can use the accusations for good by learning from them without being hurt by their condemnation.

If you are thinking to yourself that this is too good to be true, I urge you to re-read the numerous quotations I have made from Scripture and to let your faith rise to receive what God gives. If you are thinking that a gospel like this leads people to do what they please, you have overlooked that those who know God's grace know the Christ who once bore their sin. They know what sufferings their sins have caused and cannot readily return to them (cf. Prov 20:30, I Peter 4: 1). Grace is not a concept to negotiate but the action of a person who is very much alive. The apostle Peter would say that anyone who does not add virtue and kindness, etc. to his faith has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins (II Peter 1:3-9). So it is important to remember that we begin each moment of life with his forgiveness. In the power of that grace we can add virtue to faith.

To know that God loves us may seem to be all that is needed, but that very piece of knowledge would be cruel if our own sense of guilt prevented us from receiving it. The love of God must come to us in the knowledge that we are justified. (Grace reigns through righteousness, Romans 5: 21) Any other kind of love would be patronising and demeaning - taking

care of those who knew they were unworthy of being cared for. The truth is, however, that God takes great delight in us - he can see the works of his Son in us and is satisfied.

Because the new creation is a work of the Spirit and imparted by the Spirit (John 3: 5-7, 14: 15-21), its benefits belong to those who walk according to the Spirit, or set their minds on the things of the Spirit (Rom 8: 5). One cannot simply view things from a human perspective (cf. II Cor 5: 14), because natural thinking does not make sense of God's gifts (I Cor 2: 6-16). One's mind must be set fully on the grace of God (I Peter 1: 13) or natural reasoning will take over and we will find ourselves trying to work our way into God's favour by our own energies.

It is by faith that the believer is united with Christ. The full significance of this may always evade us but we should strive to understand. Christ is the vine, we are the branches (John 15: 1-5). He is the head, we are the body (Col 1:18, 2:19). We are 'one spirit' with him (I Cor 6:15-20). He is the bridegroom, we are the bride - not two but one (Ephes 5: 25-31). We do not become him, or he become us, but just as he took upon himself what we had done, so we take upon ourselves what he has done. His death becomes our death, his resurrection ours, and his righteousness too. Our life becomes one of dynamic interrelation with him. We can no longer think of ourselves apart from him. We live by faith in the Son of God (Gal 2:20). Christ is our life (Col 3:4).

If we walk in this way in the Spirit, the law is fulfilled in us. God looks on us with delight as those who have never broken his law. Our simple faith is the sole means whereby all this is credited to us. If we never had a moment of life left in which to prove ourselves it could not decrease the store of righteousness credited to us. Nor could we increase it by a lifetime of good works. Each moment of life is begun from the point of the justification given us through Christ's resurrection, and one cannot improve on that.

Nothing more needs to be done to fulfil the law. More does happen, and in fact must happen as the evidence of this new creation. But those who know how complete they are in Christ would never want to consider their works a significant addition to what they already have.

The good works which flow from justification, and the place they have in Christian consciousness will be the theme of Chapter 7, but these must not be allowed to cloud the status and experience of being at peace . with God through justification-

CHAPTER SIX

DISCOVER GOD'S KINDNESS

On the day the church began, the apostle Peter said to the crowds: 'Save yourselves from this corrupt generation' (Acts 2:40). In other words, through a proclamation of God's graciousness he was calling them to a life of righteousness. In his letter, he referred to his readers as those who had purified themselves by obeying the truth (I Peter 1:22).

The command to save ourselves or purify ourselves through obeying the truth comes to us all. God is not content with a world that cares nothing for doing his will. But he does not express himself by badgering us about the things we should do. He commands us to discover his kindness.

It will help us to understand this command if we compare ourselves with Israel in Moses' day. At a place called Kadesh Barnea, God told them to march into Palestine and claim it as their territory. Spies returned from a surveillance trip with samples of its rich produce. But a majority of them advised Israel not to proceed because of the difficulties they would encounter. A consensus vote stalled the venture. God was angry with them and declared that that whole generation over twenty years of age would die in the wilderness before the next generation had their opportunity (Num 14: 1-25).

The writer of Hebrews took up this incident to illustrate how not to respond to God's good news: 'See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's

deceitfulness' (Heb 3:7- 4:11). God is gracious to us, but we cannot reject his favours as though they were optional. We stand in great need of his grace and to reject that is to be completely at variance with his law. All its penalties lie heavily on us.

The rejection of grace explained large periods of Israel's history according to Hosea (11: 1-11). Jesus saw that this was true and recognised that the nation was doing the same to him (Luke 4:16-30, Matt 23:29-38). One may well ask why grace should be rejected. This remains somewhat a mystery, but we can note that God's kindness does not appear as such unless a person acknowledges their fault and desires the restored relationship of submission to God. Sinful human nature is antagonistic to this and prefers to retain its supposed autonomy, its craving for self-accomplishment, and its bundle of resentments. But regardless of the form it takes, rejection of God's grace, when the Holy Spirit makes it plain, is the one sin, which if persisted in, cannot be forgiven (Matt 11:20-24, John 3:18, 36, Heb 2:1-4, 6:1-8, 10:26-30). Therefore let us make every effort to know God's grace or enter his 'rest' as the writer of Hebrews directs. Let us cease trusting our own works (Heb 4: 10-11).

There can be no prerequisites to receiving God's grace. Some may wish to cite faith, or repentance, or brokenness, or childlikeness as prerequisites, but in fact, these are the opposite of prerequisites. They are the confession that one has nothing that is necessary. They are the hungry man saying to his benefactor, 'I have no bread.' It is necessary to say these things because faith (etc.) may be treated by some as a virtue. If this is so, they know no real dependence on God.

It is important not to chase someone else's experience, but it is impossible to avoid the fact that to truly experience grace is to be launched into gratefulness, humility, repentance, praise, freedom to obey, and zeal, to be relatively unconcerned with the various trials that are met (Rom 5:3-5, 8:18), to grow the

fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5: 22-23), and to love the law of God. What is important is that true love has been discovered, and reflecting that (and never any more), true love has been born in oneself. Apart from this love, the law still awaits fulfilment.

How may a person seek the knowledge of this grace? Answers to this question have become very divisive, and probably because each proponent emphasises the manner of his own experience. The church has traditionally called its sacraments the ‘means of grace’ and certainly, they are commanded in Scripture as part of the action of receiving the grace of God. (Matt 28:19, Acts 2:38, I Cor 11:23-26). All of the church’s ministry to its members and personal habits of prayer and study of the Bible could also be seen as means of grace. But as with the Old Testament sacrifices, if they are seen as grace itself rather than the signs of grace, they have no value (Isa 1: 11). Man seems constantly bent on keeping himself one step removed from God, but this is not possible with grace.

Martin Luther sought the grace of God in the sacrament of Mass, but found it in the study of Scripture. John Wesley found an understanding of grace in listening to a reading of Luther’s preface to the book of ‘Romans’. Many have come to a real encounter with God as they have thought on his word or listened to it being proclaimed. It seems best to say that grace and peace come to those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, who open themselves to hear God’s good news in Christ, and avail themselves of the means of grace available. Great sensitivity is needed in helping others to know God because revelation comes through the work of the Holy Spirit - it is not a simple human activity (Matt 16:17, John 6:63, I Cor 2: 6-16). It should also be remembered that our experience always falls short of the reality. There is always more to know than we are able to take in (Phil 3:7-16). Those who seek will find, but those who find become the most avid seekers.

However it is important to stir each other concerning

our faith. Is it real? In our eagerness to encourage, we cannot deceive. Our salvation depends wholly on the righteous actions of Christ for us, but those actions are intended to produce in us a longing to please God and a healthy awareness of our shortcomings. If these qualities are not present, something is wrong. It could be that we have never understood the grace of God but only given assent to credal statements and sought to please those who appeared to know what was right. Seek God himself, and seek to know that you are risen with him who was crucified for you. It is possible to have a correct doctrine of grace that is unmingled with faith and so unable to lead one into really knowing God.

Those who think they have understood God's grace but have not can be recognised as they go in either of two directions. Some become casual in their attitude to God, spasmodic in their use of the various means of grace, and sensual in behaviour. They have interpreted God's kindness as a relaxing of standards and become morally flabby. Others who only appear to have understood God's grace become coldly logical in their obedience. They reason that if God has loved them, they ought to be happy, and to love, and so they go about doing those things in a legalistic manner. The particular aberration which results will probably depend on the person's training, temperament, and circumstances. How much, therefore, all of us need to hear God call us into the riches of his grace, to have done with excuses and religious humbug, and to walk as God's dear children.

No one can be excused for not receiving the grace of God, but it is right to understand that there are pressures which make a true knowledge of God more difficult than it ought to be. Society surrounds us with the notion that acceptance as persons is related to achievement. Parents, perhaps unwittingly, can convey the same, sometimes in the name of wishing the best for their children. Hideously, the church often does the same in its anxious desire to have their

Christians 'looking good' (cf. Gal 6: 13). Fathers are asked not to irritate their children (i.e. by chiding them for endless petty offences) lest they discourage them (Col 3:21), even though still needing to bring them up in the discipline of the Lord (Ephes 6: 4). Likewise the church should not lay burdens on those who seek in her the message of salvation (Acts 15: 10-11). Leaders should understand how willingly some people will carry those burdens in their eagerness to 'justify' themselves.

Many, I suspect, have no true faith in the grace of God, in part, because they have believed the lie that God is as demanding as their society, or parents, or church. Jesus was eager to show that his Father was far more gracious than the normal parent (Luke 11:11-13). He castigated the Pharisees who bound heavy burdens on people's backs and so kept them out of the kingdom (Matt 23: 4, 13). We should all ask ourselves if our knowing of God has broken free of these human limits and is free to enjoy all the things the Spirit shows to be ours in Christ. Paul gave such exhortations in many of his letters (Rom 14: 13-14, Gal 1:6-7, 4:8-11, 17, 5:1-12, Phil 3:2, Col 2:8,16-23).

No one need be hindered by any of the above obstacles unless they want to be. Finally, it is only our own pride, or wilfulness, or resentment, or bitterness, that prevent us from coming to receive the grace of God (Heb 12: 15).

CHAPTER SEVEN

WILLING OBEDIENCE

The dynamics of justification are powerful because forgiveness causes us to love (Luke 7:47, I John 4: 17-19). We have constant access to God's kindness and his love is poured into our hearts (Rom 5: 1-5). The dynamics of sin are also powerful: a guilty sinner tends constantly to pervert truth, justify himself, and condemn others. Constant failure and dread of punishment lead to Servility, and sterility in real attempts to do good. But the dynamics of knowing the kindness of God can overcome the workings of guilt. Jesus and the apostles made it clear that loving would fulfil the law (Matt 7:12, 22:36-40, Rom 13:8-10, Gal 5: 14-16). This is not a piece of theoretical speculation because this teaching was given in the context of the practical life of the church.

God had promised Israel that the Messiah - or servant of the Lord - would not fail or be discouraged until he had established justice in the earth and the coastlands waited for his law (Isa 42:1-4; also 45:8, 61:3, 10-11). Now the prophecy is being fulfilled. God's grace triumphs not only in that he pardons our sins, but that in the simplicity of love we perform acts that fulfil his law. God's law triumphs not only in that it destroys evil (a doubtful victory) but in that it is gladly kept by the people of God made in his own image.

We cannot infer from this either that we must live faultless lives to show that we are saved, or that we must change all society before our deeds register as righteousness. In the Old Testament, true worshippers understood the meaning of their sacrifices and

the nature of God, and in the New Testament it was plainly inscribed in the covenant that our performance would never gain us righteousness. But being made righteous, we can account ourselves to be so, and in the exhilaration of covenanted acceptance and Spirit-given love, work deeds of righteousness. Paul shows that by bearing one another's burdens, we fulfil the law of Christ (Gal 6:2, also James 2:8). Jesus said that if we loved him we would keep his commandments (John 14: 15).

How different this is from merely 'doing our best!' A humanist can do that. We are not people whose best is good enough for God. We are people who never lose the status of complete righteousness, and who reflect that in grateful, but imperfect responses. The Spirit keeps alive within us the knowledge of who we are in Christ. Paul says: 'We, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit' (II Cor 3:18). There is no humanist model for behaviour which can approach that. Discipline and habit-forming are involved, but not on the basis of improving on yesterday's imperfection. We always reflect perfection because righteousness is already ours.

These are the beginnings of the new creation for which all creation longs (Rom 8: 19-23). In the old creation, law was effectively weakened by flesh (Rom 8:3), but now it is written on our hearts (Jer 31:31-34, Heb 8:8-13). Grace has accomplished the renewal of creation's vital element, human will.

The prophet Jeremiah had been shown that forgiveness of Israel's sins and the making of the new covenant would be accompanied by the writing of the law on people's hearts (31:31-34). This internalising would make it impossible to separate the law from the one who gave it. 'They will all know me', was included in the prophecy. This was the point at which law had so often been perverted previously. It had been intended as an indicator of the nature of their God,

but was considered an external standard required to reach God. (The N .T. often shows the old covenant as being inadequate, but it should be clear that this is not because it was defective but because it was broken. In fact it had served its purpose admirably in completing the preparation for the new covenant and so had become obsolete). Now the law, and so the nature of God, are inscribed in the very heart of persons. (The prophecy is quoted in Hebrews 8: 8-13, 10: 15-18.)

In II Corinthians 3:4-18, Paul referred to the Corinthians as a letter written by the Spirit on human hearts. This is the form of the new covenant. Our lives show that what the law requires is written on our hearts (Rom 2:15).

The apostle John, in characteristically absolute terms, wrote: 'No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him...he has been born of God' (I John 3:9). This is said in the practical context of finding out who belongs to God and who does not. He does not refer to sinlessness, but to the characteristic bent of the person's life. If there is no fundamental Change in direction so that the person loves and aspires to keep all God's commands in their true intention and laments his failures and bends his energies to reach his goal, then God's nature cannot be demonstrated to have been formed in him. II Peter 1: 1-10 says that those who do not add to their faith in God's righteousness an appropriate outworking of righteousness have forgotten that they were cleansed from their old sins. Neither Peter nor John make practical righteousness the source of justification, but both make it the evidence of justification.

Righteousness is never required of us or our justification by faith would not have been complete, but the grace of justification urges us into righteousness (trains us - Titus 2:11-14). Our faith is expressed in actions appropriate to what we long for (James 2: 22-23). Those who long for righteousness are satisfied (Matt 5:6), never with their own, but with

Christ's righteousness, because that alone is secure. But having that hope, they purify themselves. Although they themselves would place little value on their works, they are the indication of the presence of grace. Paul urged the Corinthians to produce works that would not be burned with the fire of Christ's judgement (I Cor 3:10-15). The writer of Hebrews says God would not be so unjust as to overlook the works of his readers! (Heb 6: 10).

In the battle now, the righteousness which Christians wear must surely be the virtues, not of themselves, but of Christ, or the accuser would soon find his mark (Ephes 6: 14). But what assurance do we have of his righteousness if we have not within us a new heart that longs for all that is good? (I John 3: 17-22, James 1:25, I John 5:3). In the ages to come, saints will wear not only the righteousness of their Lord, but their own righteous deeds (Rev 19: 8). Their entrance to the Father's presence will be heralded by his 'Well done, good and faithful servant' (Matt 25:21, 23). But they will be amazed that their Lord is making so much of so little: 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you...?' (Matt 25:34-40).

In another context, Paul said he delighted in the law of God in his inmost self. He referred to an unending tension between what he wanted to do and what he did, but could not deny that he really delighted in the law of God (Rom 7:22, cf. mind set on flesh being hostile to God, 8:6-7).

For those who seek God's grace and find it, law becomes a positive experience. Such persons are free to see the law as it really is. The Old Testament psalmists (Psalms 19 and 119) had seen the law as good ~ the way of life - and those who are forgiven under the New Covenant find it written on their own hearts. One could say they find law to be the description of the righteousness with which they are already credited (I Cor 6:9-11, James 1:23-25).

Romans 7 is often seen as a depressing revelation of Paul's own experience of law, but I do not think

that is the whole picture- After asserting that believers are discharged from the law (v. 6), he said that he ‘was once alive apart from the law’ (v. 9), meaning that as a pharisee, he saw the law apart from God and learnt to live with it in its humanised form. But ‘when the commandment came’, that is, at the time of his knowing God’s grace, he saw how impossible it was for a man to be justified by law (Rom 3:19-20, 5:20).

In this sense, Romans 7 parallels the prophecy of Ezekiel (36:24-32), where the revelation of grace was to lead Israel to loathe themselves- If a person is wanting to be justified by works, this is depressing. But if we understand God’s grace, it is paradoxically releasing to discover that we can do nothing. Reality, even if painful, is always a rich experience for those who know God. Those who know God’s grace are never far from shame, yet always amazed by love. They are humbled constantly by their own actions, but lifted up continually by the dignity they have in Christ’s righteousness (Rom 8:1).

The law had always had this purpose - to lead people to, or shut them up to, grace (Gal 3:23-24). Most had not seen or experienced law doing that, but that was its intention from the beginning. Presumably, if the Jews had understood that the purpose of law was to reveal sin rather than establish righteousness, they would never have experienced the bondage that they did. But because law was seen so universally as separated from grace, Paul took it up in that way (especially in Romans and Galatians) and contrasted law with grace (eg- Rom 4:14, cf. 9:31-32). From this law, Paul said, we have been redeemed (Gal 3:2-13, 4:5, 5:4, cf. Heb 7:15-19).

But Paul also saw that the law was ‘spiritual’ (Rom 7: 14), and that it was the veil over Israel’s face that made the law into a written code which killed (II Cor 3: 4-18). For those who walked in the Spirit, and so, in the good of all that Christ had done, the law was fulfilled, and the fruit of their union with Christ broke no law (Gal 5:13-23). They lived in the delight

of obedience to God, for which they were created. James also referred to a 'royal law' to be fulfilled. He called it a law of liberty (James 2: 8, 12).

In line with this, Paul spent much time in his letters spelling out the kind of behaviour appropriate to grace. He avoided calling it law, but said that believers served in the newness of spirit, not the oldness of the letter (Rom 7:6). Our obedience does not need to be compared to others, or be seen by others, or be the basis of demanding fairness from others, because our obedience flows not from law but from grace. We have frequent need of forgiveness and are eager to let others live in the forgiveness we extend to them.

Problems occur when those who presume that their view of grace is adequate, devise a system of evangelical law to which they strive to attain and which they force on others. Leaders of churches are particularly vulnerable if they have an inadequate experience of grace. Still feeling their guilt, they are in danger of codifying Christian behaviour, harassing others with their own fears, and becoming critical and demanding (I Tim 1:3-11, James 4:11-12, cf. Ephes 2:14-16). The dynamics of the kingdom of darkness (guilt and accusation) are used to 'build' the kingdom of God. The negative experience of law which ensues for many others is all the more damaging because it has the appearance of arising from the gospel.

New Testament practice generally is to emphasise grace as the positive influence on a Christian's life beyond all others. One may say that a Christian is not under law, but is under grace. He is never without authority. He 'learns' of Christ (Ephes 4:20-24) or 'adorns' the doctrine of Christ (Titus 2: 10), avoids what is contrary to sound doctrine (I Tim 1:10-11). Grace trains him to renounce irreligion and live in a godly manner (Titus 2: 11). The appearing of grace so predominates the New Testament that it is unnecessary to plead the relevance of law. Walking in the Spirit and bearing his fruit would make it impossible to break any of God's laws anyway. Christians do

well to see law in the same role that it played in history - to hedge them about so as to provide an incentive to return to grace when they stray (Rom 5:20, 7: 7-25, Gal 3:23-25). The hedge is very prickly, but appropriately so, because of the great importance of all men coming to know and live in the grace of God.

So the law is fulfilled in us because Christ made his life one with ours, and we have made ours one with his. His righteousness has been given to us as a gift. It is fulfilled in us also, because there is etched into., our very beings the will to obey. While still mortal, that obedience is always imperfect, but is a delight to the Father. Our failures he does not reckon to us because they have already been reckoned to his Son. Our works of love have eternal value because they reflect the righteousness of Christ.

If this is the manner of God's dealings with us grace, and more grace, but never unlawful - what should be the manner of our dealings with one another ?

The weightier matters of the law, Jesus said, were judgement, or justice, mercy, faithfulness (Matt 23:23), and the love of God (Luke 11:42; cf. Micah 6: 8). In other words, the weightier matters of law are those that are necessary to the ongoing of ordinary life rather than those that are necessary to preserve appearances. Believers who know God, don't need to do anything to cover their past or secure their future, and can serve their fellows and love their Father with extravagant simplicity.

CHAPTER EIGHT

HUNGRY FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS

Then how shall I love God? How can I know he means everything to me, and I mean everything to him? Surely, nothing less than this can sum up the meaning of ourselves as persons or the presence of humanity in our planet.

It is no good reducing a relationship to the part played by one and then the part played by the other. This is unsatisfactory for any human relationship and certainly for a relationship with God. Love does not consist of parts played but of interaction and the effect of parties upon one another. Love demands that something be shared and suffers deeply until it is shared.

So when we come to loving God, his part is everything, but there is no part which excludes our action. We love. We actually and really love. But we love because we have been and are being loved. The former could not remain for a moment without the latter. Equally, God's love could not come to us without it forced an outlet through our well-practised selfishness.

There are many things God wants done in us, in our families and societies, our churches, and among all peoples, yet none of it will ever be done in the manner he intends apart from taking up his grace and calling on his name. No doubt, many good things are done constantly by people who don't know God and which contribute to the well-being of the peoples of the world. But the world can never come to its goal unless all peoples relate in love to God and to one another. At the end of history 'They will neither

harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (Isa 11:9). This is the work of God's Messiah, Jesus: 'Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord almighty will accomplish this' (Isa 9:7).

When it comes to righteousness, at any level, it is God who will establish it - and so we long for it - we hunger and thirst for righteousness (Matt 5: 6)° Righteousness is all the work of God, but never without our active involvement. No righteousness could ever be established among men without them longing for it - for God to act. Each one is responsible to receive the grace of God, to let it flow into their lives, to let it tumble over all the stony places of their hearts and break up all the dry ground. Each person is responsible to let that grace flow on and out to all the peoples of the world, but starting with those who are neighbours. The whole process of grace can be thwarted at its origins if at its outlet there is a bitterness or unforgiving attitude. Where there is an unwillingness to let grace be the way of life, it can never even begin to be the source of life. One cannot open only an inlet to grace, but must open both an inlet and an outlet.

So God's grace is the source of everything that is good, but we are never uninvolved in its flow. Our very wills are renewed. The flow and the fruit of God's Spirit within us breaks no law: in fact, it fulfils God's law.

How deep all this is. Yet it is not esoteric or mystical. We only have to look honestly at ourselves to know that these things are true. We love God, yet only because he first loved us. But because he loves us, a new reality is at work to get done all the things the Father wants done. The very power of God's love is released, the power whereby all the earth is destined

to be changed.

Herein lies the un-manageableness of the Christian faith and the kingdom of God. Because this plan of God for bringing the world to its goal involves the mysteries of human choice and the unexpectedness of God's action and favour, men and women of themselves can never 'take over' the work of making the world how it should be. Let men speak for justice, promote change, take up offices so as to let their wisdom shine out in bringing about change. All this must be done to let the love of the Father be demonstrated - especially to those who suffer. God loves them and wills that his kingdom come upon them. When we wrong one another we despise God who cares for children, orphans, widows, the poor, the oppressed, and all people. So let works of righteousness flow like a river. But let us be clear that modifications or changes in structures do not bring about the kingdom, for this only comes by the fresh creative work of God in renewing people from within and by his grace.

This un-manageableness also relates to the church's proclamation of God's grace. All manner of things may be done by the church to show and to tell out what good things God has done and will do. Organisations may be set up, courses of study arranged, experiences facilitated. But what are all these but empty utensils waiting to be filled? Who would ever think that a human being could change another human being? Only God can address himself to that task. So the church must make plain the word of God in its promise and its warning, but it remains God's word, not ours, and we must wait for the Spirit to effect that word in others.

Sometimes the church appears to be like children trying to repair a clock that has stopped. They poke a fingernail into the cogs of a protruding wheel and try to force the workings into action again. They don't have the wisdom to know that the mainspring is unwound, or even broken. And wherever people are not living in a childlike enjoyment of their Father's

favour, the motive power to love freely is missing.

We talk with people for whom obedience to God is a shrivelled version of what it should be. Their experience of God has the stability of a yo-yo on a string, and all that seems to be offering, or offered by the church, is a more intensive exposure to Christian fellowship and ministry (coming from persons who may be subject to the same uncertainties), and exhortations to exert more energy or will-power. The person's faith tends to become either a soppy reliance on group experiences or a belief that is propositional and sterile - no more than a creed. When will the real situation be acknowledged and a great cry well up from the depths of persons, for righteousness which is real, and felt, and dynamic, and humbling? This is the great sin of the church, that it is preoccupied with what it can do and does not see its own need nor long for God's kingdom and righteousness - for what God alone can do.

Families also are confronted with the un-manageableness of their situation. All parents have unmanageable children. All of us have been like sheep and turned to our own way, and to suppose that parents could so reform their children by their own efforts so that they loved again from a pure heart - is more than is right to expect. Humans do not, and ought not, carry the keys to the lives of other people. So the responsibility of parents is not simply to surround children with right influence and remedial action. These are vital and play their part - they are the child's first experience of law and should be a true experience and a beautiful one. But more is needed.

Parents should also give to their children a deep exposure to kindness and grace. I think that the highest gift parents can give to their children, and in fact that any person can give to another, is to accept them in the way God accepts persons. What all people need is not sympathy, or their own way, or congratulations, or rewards, or presents, or anything else other than this kind of acceptance. This acceptance

(which we learn from God) is not a toleration or well-wishing which cares little for the values of the other, but a fundamental acceptance that the other is, that all are to be loved, and that their life has permanence and significance and cannot be disregarded. It is ready to suffer the tension and the heartache which arise because another human being is going wrong, and is unwilling to withdraw from the relationship because of the pain or the misunderstanding which come because of it.

But even perfect parents, if they existed, could not heal the wound in their children. Even an ideal environment created by people, if such were possible, could not change the life of their friends. Guilt is etched so deeply in us all that everyone must encounter the grace of God as it has been revealed in Christ. He is the only righteous one who stands before God with unashamed love, who in his earthly life, did all that his Father wanted done and so knew that he was accepted. But it is he who has borne our unrighteousness in his own body, and borne its right judgement in his crucifixion and death. He has abolished our alienation from God by bearing it, and has risen from the judgement of death to establish a new righteousness which can be received as a gift. We stand, utterly clean and unashamed, while we stand in him who died and for our sake was raised. Only a message like that can destroy the shame of failure which all humans feel and so allow them to know the love which flows untroubled and deeply through all their memories and aspirations.

Jesus Christ, the righteous one, has revealed to us the love which suffers unpretentiously the wrongs of others, and he has not withdrawn his commitment to us, and has not lost his longing that we be as he is. Because he lives, and we live in the ebb and flow of his unstained relationship with the Father, love like that is born in those who simply abide in him.

There is nothing ordinary about this message. It is miraculous to its core. It is the new creation in

which, as the original creation, everything is sustained by the Lord's own powerful word (Heb 1:3). Do we long to love more freely? Then hunger for righteousness. Do we desire to see others come to love God? Then thirst for them to be righteous. Do we weep over our world? Then hunger and thirst for its righteousness. Do we long to stand before God, both as persons and as a race, without need to be ashamed? Then hunger and thirst for righteousness and your hunger will not go unheeded. You will be filled. And finally the earth will be filled with righteousness - and love for God.

The peoples of this world can really live in righteousness. Not a righteousness of their own making where hopes are constantly dashed to the ground through failure, but a righteousness from God, through Christ, received by faith. Living in this righteousness, we can cope with the errors of ourselves and others because we know that Christ has already borne them. Being clothed in this righteousness, there is no need to react to the failures of others, or make up for, or cover up, the sins in ourselves. God's kindness keeps us clean. We live with God as those whose natures have been made like his (II Peter 1:4), and we love him. His grace trains us in the keeping of his law. Because we love him, and for no other reason, we keep his commandments. This is how we love him.