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There's no point in our just knowing things *about* God without the life of God coming to us. To receive His life, we need His light; we need illumination.

Christ's life is the light of men (John 1:4). The light *is* His life, and it's His life that's coming to us. The evidence that we've begun to be illuminated is that His life will begin to touch us, and a spirit of grace and supplication will begin to take hold of us by the heart. When His life begins to touch us, the sin that we could not stop acting on and that has been corrupting and killing us begins to depart from us. We are changed by His life, and *only* by His life, not by head knowledge, osmosis, proximity or any other means.

Jesus, full of grace and truth

The light shows us the marred face of Jesus and makes His sufferings evident to us. We begin to hear Christ's call to participate with Him in those sufferings, by which we are being redeemed as His blood buys us back from death.

The marred face of Christ is not the face of a clean, sanitised, middle-class Jesus who is suffering heroically. It's the face of His offering to the death; a burnt offering, through which the light of life was revealed and made available to men. Paul described the light that shines from the face of Christ as the light of the Gospel of the glory of God (2 Corinthians 4:6).

The Apostle John described that glory slightly differently, saying:

"And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14)

In Christ's face, as He is lifted up, we see Him full of grace and truth. John was explaining that the glory of Christ is the substance and expression of new creation sonship - new creation life that is born of the Father (2 Corinthians 5:17). What is born of the Father *will* be demonstrably full of grace and truth. This fullness does not come in us by head knowledge. Jesus the man was *born* of God, so He was full of grace and truth. When we receive the light of the knowledge of the glory of God as it is coming to us from the face of Jesus, we receive of His fullness of grace and truth. Isn't that wonderful?

Turn to Christ and see

Previously, we've spoken of the need to turn to Christ to have the veil that naturally obscures our sight removed, so we can see and know the

light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus (2 Corinthians 3:15-16). We really need to come to grips with this and allow the Holy Spirit to confirm it in our hearts so that it is true in us; so that turning to the Lord and seeing becomes our living experience. But how do we do that? How do we turn to Him and see the light of God's glory shining from the face of Jesus? Well, we find it right in the midst of our difficulty, of our suffering.

As you get 'pushed' by life, if you're a typical person and a bit carnal, you'll start to push right back. Paul did that three times, praying and asking the Lord to remove his difficulty from him until the Lord answered, 'No. You *need* this, and My grace is sufficient for you. You're going to find the fullness of grace here as you embrace Me. Turn to me; look to me; and see My face shining upon you. The fullness of My grace, from My marred face, will be available to you.' (2 Corinthians 12:7-9).

If we keep 'kicking against the goads', fighting our difficulties, we're not going to receive any reward. The suffering might eventually stop, but what will you have at the end of it? You might be bitter; you might be angry; you might be self-justifying. You might even say that you did a terrific job coping. But you won't have what God is trying to establish in you. It's His *grace* that's all sufficient, the fullness of His capacity that can come to us and equip us for that suffering.

We've got to be able to turn to the Lord when we're under pressure, instead of doing the various things we do to relieve the pressure we feel. For example, you might find whipper snipping therapeutic - fast moving parts, loud machine noise, grass and dust flying everywhere. Or you might distract yourself from personal difficulties by throwing yourself into your work. But the Lord knows us, and tells us when we do things because we're not

coping. When He does, we need to turn again to Him, acknowledging, 'You're right Lord, I'm not coping with this pressure I'm under'.

Christ will tell us that we actually need this very pressure. Rather than asking Him to take it away, embrace it and turn back to Him, looking into His marred face, joining Him where *He* is suffering. As we embrace the difficulty God has given to us, the sufficiency of His grace comes to us. As we turn and look on Him, the veil over our sight is taken away, and we know, 'Yes, I can now see what's going on. That old thing that's led me astray for so long is being removed from me; I'm being preserved from what would lead me astray if not for this pressure.'

God gives us His grace

To keep finding His grace, we have to keep turning to Him and repenting. Then we can see the stupidity of our own flesh and its self-justifying, self-preserving mechanisms. This is a daily reality.

Through Christ, God ministers the grace of His own Being as Yahweh, Lord. This is why, when Jesus was speaking to the Jews, He said:

"...When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am..." (John 8:28)

'I am' - Yahweh. He was saying, 'You will not only know *that* I am, you will know *who* I am'. We'll begin to truly know Him because we'll be drawn into relationship with Him. That was the desire of Paul's heart:

"...that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings..." (Philippians 3:10)

The marred face of Jesus draws us into that fellowship, as we turn to Him, and God's favour is ministered to us from His grace, which is His love, word, life and Spirit. The grace of God is

given to us to make us sons in the image of Christ's sonship. God the Father is conforming us to the image of His Son. Isn't that wonderful?

He conforms us, but we remain ourselves. The grace of Christ is available for us and is coming to us to conform us to the image of Christ. Where do our capacities figure in that process? They don't. Not our intellect, our physical prowess, the length of our church membership, or our grace gifts - not even if we speak with the tongues of angels and men. None of these affect the grace of God that is available to us, coming from the face of Christ; coming to us from the offering of Yahweh that was made before time.

The Father, Son and Holy Spirit covenanted together to create and bring to glory an innumerable company of sons, born of Their life and joined to Their fellowship. They live in fellowship, and They establish a ministry of light to call others into Their fellowship, into the way They live. The fellowship of the Three in one Spirit is an aspect of God's love, which is one of the four aspects of His grace.

If you try to work that out intellectually so you can join Their fellowship based on what you know about the Bible, or about anything else, you'll really struggle and fear you'll be lost in the trying. Rather, He calls us into His fellowship and ministers to us His grace, His unmerited favour.

The offering of the Son

God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit made the fullness of Their one life and Spirit available for the sons of God through offering. The grace of God is the fullness of the life of God, which was given to the Son (Colossians 2:9). The Son's offering of Himself to the Father to be His Son, and all the fullness that was given to the Son, were fully revealed in time through the cross.

There, as Jesus offered Himself up to the Father, He made the grace of God available to every person who looks upon Him, who sees Him lifted up.

By this offering of the Son, the grace of God that was given to Him was made available to the sons of men as the light of the glory of Christ, shining from His face. As sons of men look on Him and receive this light, they are given the right to become sons of God (John 1:12).

Just convincing someone about certain historical truths concerning Jesus isn't enough. They do need to know and believe those things, but the vital thing is that they look upon Christ, who is suffering *for* them; who is the offering of God for them; who has the complete package of grace for them and for their lives. As *that* begins to touch their hearts, they are cut to the heart. Christian apologetics alone don't bring about conversion.

This treasure in earthen vessels

As the word of the cross is proclaimed to us by Christ's messengers, the four aspects of His grace - His Spirit, life, word and love - are reflected from the marred, crucified face of Christ and are ministered into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. His grace is given to us as a treasure to possess, so that we, who are earthen vessels, carry this treasure around in us.

"For God...is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels..." (2 Corinthians 4:6-7)

In this way, we receive the wonderful treasure of the grace of God coming into our hearts. We are still ourselves, yet we possess the treasure of God's grace. Now, how can this be true in us?

Well, it takes a process, a very important way of life that Paul described as dying daily, carrying about in our bodies the dying of Jesus so that His life may be manifested in us (1 Corinthians 15:31; 2 Corinthians 4:10).

The treasure of God's grace in us transforms us into the same image and glory of sonship that we see in Christ. This transformative capacity that we receive is the key point of the Gospel. We're not religiously attending church, believing certain precepts or creeds – we're actually having this happen in our lives. We're possessing His treasure, knowing that the unmerited grace and favour of God that He extends to us is ours, not because we deserve it but because the love of God has found us and is in our hearts. This is not the vague belief: 'I have Jesus in my heart and it makes me feel good'. This is *knowing* that we've met with Him, and He with us, and that we've received of His fullness.

We need to *know* this! When you're working evangelistically with people, there comes a point where there is nothing more you can do or say to them. The light and grace of God have to come to them or nothing happens. People making vague commitments because they want their life to be better, or their marriage to improve or the church to discipline their children will at some point have their motives tested by the Lord. If we're honest, we've *all* from time to time had some funny motives that the Lord has had to test and cut out of us - motives that looked for Him to do something we wanted or thought was needed. But God has *already* done something for us: He's given us a treasure. When we ask God, 'What are you going to do for me?', and He replies, 'I've given you treasure', are we going to shrug off His priceless gift and say, 'Yes, but apart from that, what is there?'

It's important to understand that receiving His grace causes us to join a fellowship which is in the light. We *need* to join this fellowship.

"...if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship..." (1 John 1:7)

Participating together in His life

Let's think about this another way. Grace comes to us every day through the word of God. Why, then, do we get together on a Sunday if we're already receiving all that grace? We come together because the Lord has given the treasure of His life to each of us, to each earthen vessel. When we come together and offer, God's life multiplies to us through the grace He's given to individual people. He's given grace to every single one of His children, and we look for participation in our communion together so that His grace can come to each one in the fullness that's needed for the week to come.

This corporate ministry of grace is anchored in a fellowship in the word of present truth - the word the Lord is currently speaking to us - which brings light and illumination to us. It's *this* word that's ministered to equip us for the works we are to do (Ephesians 4:12). That's why we have elders and deacons functioning in the church: to care for and shepherd us in a fellowship and to call us *to* a fellowship. If we don't want to join the Lord's fellowship, thinking, 'Well, I don't mind the individual relationship with God, but I don't know about this fellowship thing', then there's nothing anyone can do for us. If everything's got to be done our way, we're going to have a lousy time. It's as we lay our lives down that fellowship in the light is found, and a ministry of light shines.

The Apostle Paul preached Christ crucified, and ministered the Gospel in the weakness of Christ, testifying:

"I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God." (1 Corinthians 2:2-5)

That completely shatters the desire of our flesh to validate itself. The only One Paul lifted up was Christ, and Him crucified, and that is why he could demonstrate the Spirit and power of Christ in just the same way he'd seen Christ lifted up when Stephen was stoned. He'd seen Stephen's face looking like the face of an angel, and, as Stephen was dying, heard him say just what Jesus had said when *He* was dying: 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them.' (Acts 6:15; 7:54-60).

Paul preached Christ and Him crucified by demonstrating the weakness that Christ demonstrated, so that the glory and the power of the Gospel he preached would not be of men but of God. He was able to minister the word of God as light - the same light that had shone into his heart as a treasure that was now in him, the treasure that was the life of Jesus being formed in him. He knew he'd been co-crucified with Christ through baptism, not by ritual but in truth (Galatians 2:20). He'd joined the faith of Christ's crucifixion and therefore, the circumcision of Christ was active in his life.

Think of snow skiing as an example. You can't ski theoretically, you have to *actually* ski, but once you do, you can't help skiing. Until you're actually skiing, you just don't *get* it. But once you do ski, you *can* ski. Many things in the

Christian life are a bit like this: until you're doing them, they make no sense to you at all, and they're as frustrating as trying to learn to snow ski. Some give up, in high dudgeon, and exclaim, 'Yeah, well, that might be true, but it certainly doesn't work for me'. How often people say, 'I've tried that, just the way you said, and it didn't work. I couldn't do it, so it doesn't work!' But just because *you* couldn't do it doesn't mean it couldn't be done. The extrapolation doesn't hold. Saying, 'I don't know why you're talking about being circumcised with Christ. That wasn't my experience, so it mustn't be true' or, 'It didn't work for me when I tried it, so it won't work at all', or 'I didn't find that, so there's no such thing and I'm fine to go on sinning' is nonsense. We've got to be very careful when people complain that the way of salvation set for them 'didn't work'. Does Yahweh's grace not work? Are you trying to apply it to your problems like some sort of weedkiller? The gift of Yahweh is not like that.

You can't just *try* God's grace. You have to *live* it for it to have its work in you. And that means laying down your life; losing the things that get you wound up. I can tell you, as long as those things keep on winding you up, you'll be stuck in difficulty. You'll be stuck until you turn and keep turning to Christ, right in the heat of those things that keep provoking you. You've got to turn to the Lord again, thanking Him for 'tapping you on the shoulder'. The Holy Spirit is very helpful that way!

Paul wrote that he was always carrying about in his body the dying of the Lord Jesus, in the fellowship His sufferings, so that the life of Jesus would also be manifest in him, for himself and for others:

"...so death works in us, but life in you."
(2 Corinthians 4:12)

That fellowship of dying and living with Christ is the fellowship that the Apostles preached and lived for the church. Some people received their message and lived it. Others, like the Corinthians, tried to enshrine the Apostles' teaching as a set of beliefs that, once held, meant they didn't need the Apostles' fellowship any more. They thought they were full and had no further need of anyone or anything else (1 Corinthians 4). They didn't think they needed to be made disciples. The problem was, they left the fellowship of the Gospel and grace they'd received. Paul had to call them back to it so they could have the *life* of it, in a fellowship of offering.

Can I exhort you to join the fellowship of offering? So many issues in people's lives stem from standing back and looking at everything from the outside, judging what's right and wrong. That stance kills those who take it. Jesus said:

"For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it". (Mark 8:35)

You will never, ever find the life and grace of God by trying to assess and work out intellectually what's right and wrong. It doesn't work that way. Christ, and Him crucified, is the message and light of the Gospel. Paul received and was converted by this light, and spoke of it when he was testifying to King Agrippa:

"...a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, [shone] all around me and those who were journeying with me. And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' And I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting'" (Acts 26:13-15).

The light Paul saw was the light of the glory of Christ shining from His face. It was His grace coming to Paul, with the opportunity for Paul to receive that grace. You might say, 'Well, if that happened to me, of course I'd become a Christian'. But that's not necessarily so. Paul could have resisted. The grace of God is not irresistible.

When Jesus asked Paul why he was persecuting Him, Paul responded, 'Who are You Lord'? Then Jesus introduced Himself to Paul as Jesus, the suffering Christ whom Paul was persecuting (Acts 26:15). He was showing Paul His marred face.

Paul had been vehemently angry and breathing threats. He'd gone out to do what he thought was the righteousness of God: to ensure that only true religion was preached. But he was only enforcing his own righteousness. So, Jesus brought Paul face to face with the suffering he had been causing Christ.

It's an interesting question: 'Who are You Lord?', because it shows Paul really didn't know Him. That's what he was saying: 'I don't *know* You.' In those times when the Lord confronts *us*, and we're found to be 'out there' on our own, we too have to say, 'I haven't known You as I should. Who are You, Lord?' We have to come back to Him, the Shepherd Watchman of our souls (1 Peter 2:25).

The light of God's glory

The light that shone around Paul was the light of the knowledge of the glory of God through which grace and truth were being made available to him. The Lord Jesus said to Paul:

"...get up and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in

which I will appear to you; rescuing you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.” (Acts 26:16-18)

What a wonderful statement! When Jesus sent the disciple Ananias to minister to Paul, He told Ananias:

“...I will show [Paul] how much he must suffer for My name’s sake.” (Acts 9:16)

That’s a minister of the Gospel, suffering with Christ.

We are *all* to know the grace of God coming to us, and although our conversion may not have been as dramatic as Paul’s, there are times when His coming to us *is* dramatic. When His conviction hits you, it’s dramatic. You mightn’t be on a donkey as Paul was. You might be in your car, or whipper snipping, or anywhere doing anything when He comes to you in His mercy, calling, ‘Turn around. Look in My face.’ And as you turn to look at Him, the veil is taken away; the veil of your own thinking, the veil of your aggravation over your unjust or uncontrollable suffering.

Nobody likes it when unjust things that are beyond their control are happening. But what are we going to do? Are we going to bog down there and let injustice or hurt shape the way we deal with life? Or, are we going to turn and look in the face of Christ where all His grace and truth are available for us? He has the answer for us, and the way through (1 Corinthians 10:13).

As the light shone from the face of Christ into Paul’s heart by the Holy Spirit, he was converted. He received his name - who he was going to be - and was told what the life and

works associated with his name would be (Acts 26:13-18). God doesn’t look *back* over your life, he looks in advance, affirming, ‘This is you!’, so that His naming rests upon you. The Holy Spirit then confirms to us, every step of the way: ‘Don’t go that way - that’s not you. Go this way’. We may balk a bit at His leading, particularly if He’s leading us *not* to do something we think we’re good at, or to do something we don’t want to do. But as we hear Him, He establishes us in our name.

Paul received the treasure of Christ’s life within him. This was the light that he would bear to the gentiles as a minister of Christ. Jesus said that He would show Paul more of what this would mean for his life. The first step in receiving this further clarification and capacity came though the disciple Ananias, who prayed for Paul and then baptised him into the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 9:10-19). Paul had to be taught, submitting to instruction for fourteen years (Galatians 1:11-2:1). You and I also need to be taught, and we’re going to be taught in the body of Christ.

Everyone wants to learn, but not many people want to be taught. Indeed, many in Western society *resist* being taught but are puffed up with much learning instead. That was the Corinthians’ problem. They were puffed up, insisting, ‘We’ve *got* it!’ But Paul said to them, ‘Now hang on. What do you have that you didn’t receive? Is what you have really yours?’ (1 Corinthians 4:7). God questioned Job in much the same way, asking: ‘Were you there when the foundations of the earth were laid?’ (Job 38:4). We’ve all got to come back to that point, humbly joining the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings, admitting that truly, we know very little. But in His fellowship, we *can* come to know.

In his first letter, John wrote that the message he and his brethren were preaching was light

that would bring illumination to those who received it, and would establish them in true fellowship:

“This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all...if we walk in the Light as He himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.”

(1 John 1:5-7)

Because the life in Christ is the light of men, and His life is in His blood (John 1:4, Leviticus 17:11), then as we walk in His light without trying to justify, validate or define ourselves, without trying to be self-righteous, we access His life, and His blood works in us and cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:5-7).

The most insidious manifestation of self-righteousness in a Christian is the mistaken belief that we have integrity. Can you see why that is? What could possibly be wrong with believing, ‘I’m a Christian. I have a clear conscience before God, and I have integrity’? The problem is that someone who believes that is among the most unreachable people in the world. Truly, we have no personal integrity. To think we do means that, like the Pharisees, we have no need of Jesus. On what basis, then, are we to speak or do anything as Christians? We are to speak and act from the basis of the love of God, by the motivation of the Holy Spirit.

The Apostles preached the Gospel of light that connects hearers to the fellowship of Yahweh - God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit - in the body of Christ, where the blood of Christ is effective to cleanse us from the sin of living according to our own desires. His blood enables us to live as sons of God because *His* life becomes *our* life, and we are then able to minister this life to others.