

**Are  
Grace  
Lifers  
Deists?**



**By Bryan C. Ross**

## Introduction

Recent events in Haiti have once again fueled discussion regarding the extent to which God is active within his creation. Atheists and skeptics cite these events as support for their classic argument against God's existence, the problem of evil. Supporters of this view assert that a loving all powerful God would not allow the carnage, suffering, and selfishness witnessed in Haiti over the past couple of weeks. The very fact that God did not prevent these events is proof enough for many atheists that God does not exist or if he does, that he is not all powerful, all knowing and loving. On the other side of the coin, religious leaders such as Pat Robertson have suggested that the Haitians are merely reaping the fruit of an ill-fated pact with the forces of darkness. According to this line of thinking, God intervened physically to punish the Haitian people for their past transgressions.

While many Christians might balk at or ridicule Robertson's views as extremist, the fact remains that many believers, even grace believers, are theological and philosophically committed to the notion that God is sovereign and everything happens for a reason. According to prevailing Christian orthodoxy, God is in control, and his immutable will is being executed daily in the details of life. Consequently, all events small or great, good or bad, find their origin in the sovereign will of God. Even though humanity cannot see God's purpose in such events, most evangelicals are confident that God has a higher purpose for everything that happens. Still others, perhaps sensing the implications of such a view on the character of God, try to skirt the issue by saying that God did not actively cause the Haitian earthquake, but merely allowed it.

Let us consider what God has to say about the issue. In II Timothy 2:4, the Apostles Paul writes, "who **will have all men to be saved**, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth." God's will is clearly stated in this verse that all men come to saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, this will not happen because Satan is actively engaged in blinding the minds of the lost "lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them."<sup>1</sup> In other words, the stated will of God for all men to be saved through the light of the gospel is being actively thwarted by Satan's attempts to blot out the gospel's witness in the minds of the lost. But this is not what the prevailing Calvinist-influenced orthodoxy would have you believe.

Think with me for a moment about the theological implications of suggesting that God has orchestrated what has occurred in Haiti. Is there anyone who thinks that all of the people who died in the Haitian tragedy were saved? Unfortunately, the majority of the people who perished probably had not trusted in the shed blood of Jesus Christ as the only payment for their sin. Consequently, if the Haitian disaster is the will of God, then God is the active agent in sending countless people to eternal judgment and separation from him. Sound theological reasoning will not allow a Bible believer to reach such a conclusion, because it would violate God's stated will that all men be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.

There is another option for the believing Bible students to consider. The existence of evil in the world is not proof that God does not exist. Possessing the gift of self determination Adam exercised his freedom<sup>2</sup> and disobeyed God, thereby bringing sin into the world. Romans 5:12 states, “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” The reason people die whether by natural disaster, war, murder, accident, or old age is because of sin. In Romans 6:23, the Apostle Paul encapsulates mankind’s sin problem when he writes, “for the wages of sin is death.” Humanity was not the only portion of God’s creation that was negatively affected by Adam’s rebellious choice. According to Romans 8:22, “. . . the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now,” as a consequence of Adam’s sin. The explanation for the earthquake in Haiti, and other natural disasters is that the very ground of the earth itself has been cursed as a result of the fall.<sup>3</sup> Tornados, hurricanes, earthquakes, tsunamis, mudslides, and every other type of natural disaster are caused by sin’s effect upon the created order. In short, until the curse is removed, natural disasters and human calamities will continue to plague mankind. However, events such as these ought not to be attributed to God’s intervention within his creation.

What God does today is work through his word rather than through direct physical intervention like he did with Israel in time past. This logically follows from the mid-Acts dispensational viewpoint. This view has been referred to by different names in different parts of the world, including The Grace Alternative, the Grace Life, and Pure Grace. Many believers, even grace believers, are uncomfortable with this view of how God works. As one might expect, the old guard within the so-called Grace Movement is less than thrilled with many of the teachings of the Grace Life movement on prayer, confession of sins, God’s will, intervention, and chastisement to name a few.

Critics of the Pure Grace position have accused those who believe in the principles of the Grace Life of being Deists. The purpose of this work is to consider whether or not supporters of the Grace Alternatives are in fact Deists. In order to pursue this analysis, we will first outline the fundamental differences between supporters of the Grace Life doctrines and other mid-Acts dispensationalists. Second, we will define and explain the basic tenants of Deism. Third, we will compare the beliefs of the Grace Life with those of Deists in an attempt to answer our fundamental question: are Grace Lifers Deists?

## What is a Grace Lifer?

At the outset, in order to ensure clarity, it is imperative to define our terms and identify the various doctrinal positions that will be discussed in this work. Due to its use in a multiplicity of contexts, the expression “the grace life” is somewhat difficult to define. Teachers such as Bob George, have used the term to describe the system of identity based living that stems from the fact that the old man is dead through the believers’ identification with Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection.<sup>4</sup> Often called the “exchanged life,” supporters of this position stress the grace of God in giving believers a new identity in Jesus Christ. According to this view, believers struggle against their natural flesh programming to function fully in their new identity. Believers are instructed to view themselves as God views them, i.e. as completely new creatures in Jesus Christ.

Much of what Bob George and his school of thought teach is in line with Pauline theology and the views espoused by those holding the Pure Grace position. In fact, this author and his family have benefited greatly from reading the writings of those who are associated with this branch of Grace Life thinking. However, George and his followers fail to properly root their position in a dispensational understanding of the scriptures. By failing to fully recognize the distinctive message and ministry of the Apostle Paul, advocates for the exchanged life are ultimately confused in their attempts to reconcile statements of Jesus in the gospels with those in the epistles of Paul.

Herein lies a key distinction that is necessary for the reader to understand. When this writer speaks about the Grace Life, the Grace Alternatives, or Pure Grace, he is referring to a specific system of belief whose origins are rooted in a mid-Acts dispensational interpretation of scripture. Mid-Acts dispensationalists maintain that the body of Christ did not begin in Acts two as the majority of professing Christendom believes but in the middle portion of Acts with the salvation and ministry of the Apostle Paul. While there is great diversity of belief amongst those who would identify themselves as mid-Acts dispensationalists, generally all of them hold the following beliefs:

- Literal, normal, or common sense reading of the Bible.
- Comparative principle of Bible study, comparing scripture with scripture.<sup>5</sup>
- Dispensational reading of the Bible which seeks to answer the following questions: Who wrote it? When was it written? To whom was it written?
- A difference between prophecy (that which was spoken since the world began),<sup>6</sup> and mystery (that which was kept secret since the world began).<sup>7</sup>
- The unprophesied nature of the current dispensation of grace,<sup>8</sup> during which time God is reconciling both Jews and Gentiles to himself in one body by the cross.<sup>9</sup>

- Through unbelief Israel fell from the privileged position she enjoyed in time past so that God could have mercy upon all and send salvation to the gentiles apart from Israel.<sup>10</sup>
- The Apostle Paul is the apostle of the gentiles<sup>11</sup> and received by direct revelation from Jesus Christ a gospel, message, and apostleship distinct from that of Peter and the Twelve.<sup>12</sup>
- Salvation is a free gift of God's grace imparted to a sinner upon his placing saving faith in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the only payment for sin.<sup>13</sup>
- The gospel of the grace of God, the message Paul calls "my gospel"<sup>14</sup> was separate and distinct from the gospel of the kingdom<sup>15</sup> and the gospel of the circumcision<sup>16</sup> preached by Peter and the twelve.
- Believers of the gospel of grace are spiritually baptized into the body of Christ by God the Holy Spirit the moment they place saving faith in Jesus Christ.<sup>17</sup> This is the one baptism that constitutes the unity of the faith in Ephesians 4:5. Therefore, water baptism needs to be left where it belongs as part of Israel's earthly program. As a result, water baptism has no significance for the body of Christ despite denominational demands to the contrary.
- God the Holy Spirit seals believers into the body of Christ until the day of redemption, thereby eternally securing their position in Christ.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, this work of the Holy Spirit serves as the earnest of our inheritance as we wait for the redemption of our bodies.<sup>19</sup>
- Prophecy, tongues, and knowledge, otherwise known as the sign gifts, functioned on a temporary basis during the early stages of the body of Christ.<sup>20</sup> While there is great diversity of opinion amongst mid-Acts dispensationalists about what actually caused the cessation of these gifts, it is generally agreed that they are no longer in effect. It should also be noted that the majority of mid-Acts dispensationalists still believe that the gifts of pastor, teacher, and evangelist are still being given today.<sup>21</sup>
- There is a distinction between the Lord's bodily return back to planet Earth (Second Coming)<sup>22</sup> and his return to meet the saints in the air.<sup>23</sup> The later is known as the rapture of the church and is believed to be pretribulational in its timing. In addition, the catching away of the saints referred to in I Thessalonians 4 is also a portion of the revelation of the mystery given to the Apostle Paul.<sup>24</sup> Not only does the rapture occur before the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel begins (which is part of the prophetic program), but it also ends the current dispensation of grace.
- The 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel, commonly referred to as the tribulation period, or the time of Jacob's trouble, will resume the prophetic time schedule that was

interrupted when God revealed the mystery of the current dispensation of grace. It is during this time that numerous prophetic events will occur on earth.

- After the tribulation period is completed, Christ will return bodily back to earth with the armies of heaven to destroy the forces of the adversary. Satan will be chained and confined to the bottomless pit for a thousand years and the millennial reign of Christ will be instituted.<sup>25</sup>

Admittedly, the preceding list is not an exhaustive statement of the doctrines held by mid-Acts dispensationalists. However, it does encapsulate the major differences between mid-Acts dispensationalists and the teachings of Bob George, as well as the rest of professing Christendom. Consequently, for the purpose of answering the central question purposed in this booklet--are Grace Lifers Deists?--we will be limiting the use of the term Grace Life and its related descriptors to a specific group of believers who hold to the basic doctrines of mid-Acts dispensationalism listed above.

Simply stated, all Grace Lifers are mid-Acts dispensationalists but not all mid-Acts dispensationalists are Grace Lifers. As one might expect, this division within the mid-Acts camp has generated much friction. In fact, the charge of Deism against those who believe in the principles of Pure Grace has been levied most forcefully by their fellow mid-Acts brethren.

The fundamental source of the argument between the Grace Life and Non-Grace Life camps of the mid-Acts dispensationalism centers on how and to what extent their dispensational model affects God's working in time during the present dispensation of grace. Supporters of the Grace Alternatives argue that their beliefs are simply the logical implications of the mid-Acts position when taken to its theological conclusion. Detractors have accused Grace Lifers of espousing an extreme position resulting in Deism if not outright heresy. What is it then that Grace Lifers believe that would illicit such a charge from their would be doctrinal allies?

In the introduction to *Things That Differ*, arguably the most influential work articulating the mid-Acts position, Pastor C.R. Stam writes the following:

As we send these studies forth we humbly pray that they may prove a substantial contribution to our readers' understanding and enjoyment of the Scriptures, and a distinct help in their services for Christ. As the days grow darker may God lead us all further into the light of His truth so that we may be more intelligently and effectively used, 'to the glory of His grace.'<sup>26</sup>

Grace Lifers maintain that they have followed the basic truths presented in *Things That Differ* to their logical conclusion. If the gospel, the beginning of the body of Christ, baptism, and the sign gifts are dispensational issues, then why are issues such as the confession of sins, intervention, healing, God's will, spiritual gifts, chastening, and prayer not also affected by the mid-Acts paradigm?

Grace Lifers believe that God works in accordance with the nature of the dispensation that is in effect. During the current dispensation of grace, God is forming a spiritual body of believers in which all physical divisions have been removed.<sup>27</sup> Hence, all the blessings that the body of Christ receives are spiritual in nature according to Ephesians 1:3, “blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.” In Ephesians 1:4-9, believers received the following spiritual blessings the moment they trusted Christ: predestination unto the adoption of children, acceptance in the beloved, redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, wisdom and prudence in abundance, and knowledge of the mystery of his will. Moreover, believers are said to be spiritually seated with Christ in the heavenly places as we wait for the Lord’s return to catch away the church.<sup>28</sup> In short, the salvation and blessings of the body are all spiritual in nature while our destiny is heavenly in location.

In II Corinthians 5:16-17, Paul encapsulates the main argument of the Grace Life view. He writes, “wherefore henceforth **know we no man after the flesh**: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, **yet now henceforth know we him no more**. Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a **new creature**: old things are passed away; behold, **all things are become new**.” Paul teaches that as new creatures in Christ our relationship with Christ is not based upon the flesh. Believers are placed into a living spiritual unity and relationship with the head of the body of Christ. This explains why Paul tells the Colossians that their circumcision was not made with hands.<sup>29</sup> God’s entire relationship with the believers today is based upon their spiritual union with Christ.

In contrast, Israel’s relationship with God in time past was based upon the flesh. In fact, Paul informs the Ephesians that the fundamental feature of time past is a distinction between those who were “gentiles in the flesh” and those who were “called the Circumcision **in the flesh made by hands**.”<sup>30</sup> Genesis 17:13 tells us that God gave the seed of Abraham the rite of circumcision as a fleshly token of the physical blessings God had promised them in Genesis 12. As a result, God dealt with his physical nation according to the flesh. For example, Israel was delivered physically from the hands of the Egyptians through the Red Sea.<sup>31</sup> Signs were utilized all throughout God’s dealings with Israel because without them they would not believe.<sup>32</sup>

Just as mid-Acts dispensationalists maintain a clear distinction between Israel and the body of Christ, Grace Lifers observe a clear distinction between how God deals with each group. These differences have led Grace Lifers to the following conclusions regarding how God is working today in the dispensation of Grace:

- Believers have the total forgiveness of all their sins: past, present, and future.<sup>33</sup> Through the justification that is in Christ Jesus believers have peace with God.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, the keeping of short accounts or the daily confession of sins according to I John 1:9 is unnecessary and a misuse of the verse.

- Believers presently possess the complete redemption of their soul and spirit (inner man). Moreover, the saints are asked to wait for the redemption of their body<sup>35</sup> and have been given the indwelling Holy Spirit as the assurance of this future redemption.<sup>36</sup> Consequently, God is not presently choosing to heal people from their physical infirmities.
- Because believers are at peace with God, they are not physically chastened like Israel was in time past. However, they are chastened and corrected through God's written word.
- Paul's revelation completed God's Word according to Colossians 1:25. Once the word of God was fulfilled, all spiritual gifts including pastor, teacher, and evangelist ceased being given. While pastors, teachers, and evangelists are still needed they are no longer being given as supernatural gifts of the Spirit. Paul was already speaking of these gifts in the past tense when he penned Ephesians 4:11, "**And he gave some**, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;"
- God does intervene during the dispensation of grace but not the in physical sense that he did in time past with Israel. God works today through his word working in the lives of the saints as they by faith apply God's word to the details of their lives. This is viewed to be in accordance with the nature of our relationship with Christ not being after the flesh but after the spirit as taught in II Corinthians 5:16-17.
- Prayer also functions in accordance with the dispensation that is in effect. Many mid-Acts dispensationalists acknowledge that prayer is a dispensational issue when they teach that the Lord's Prayer is not for today. Likewise, many teach that unlike Israel in time past, members of the body of Christ do not need to confess their sins in order for God to hear from heaven because we have peace with God through the shed blood of Christ.

The above list is not intended to be an exhaustive articulation of Pure Grace principles. Rather, it serves as a brief summary of the main differences between Grace Lifers and their mid-Acts brethren. Furthermore, it serves to frame the central question that we are seeking to answer.

The observant reader will have noticed that Grace Lifers articulate a different paradigm for how God is working during the dispensation of grace than has traditionally been taught. This seemingly hands off approach is difficult for many believers to swallow because it is not rooted in a traditional Calvinistic framework. Not everything that happens is part of God's will or His action within creation according to Grace Lifers.

Because the Pure Grace position views God as active only through his word in the lives of believers and not intervening physically in human affairs, the charge has been made that Grace Lifers are Deists. In order to accurately assess whether this charge is correct,



it would be helpful to clearly understand what Deists believe. In the next chapter we will direct our efforts towards exploring the basic beliefs of Deists.

## What is Deism?

Many modern Americans are familiar with the terms Deist or Deism as it relates to the ongoing debate over the religious beliefs of the nation's founders. As products of the Enlightenment, men such as Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Paine,<sup>37</sup> and possibly others, relied heavily upon the ideas of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Voltaire, Baron de Montesquieu, and Jean Jacques Rousseau in forming the philosophical foundations of the American form of government. Recent years have seen a massive debate emerge amongst historians over whether George Washington was a Deist or a Christian. Some historians have tried to portray Washington as a card-carrying Deist. In 2006, Peter A. Lillback, wrote a massive book titled, *George's Washington's Sacred Fire*, in which he seeks to document using Washington's own journals and correspondence as well as other primary sources our first president's deeply rooted Christian faith.

For those unfamiliar with the term, Deism is derived from the Latin word *dues* which means God. Similarly, theism comes from the Greek word *theos* which also means God. As the etymology of the word implies, Deism is a form of theism that maintains the belief in a creator God unlike atheism which does not. John Orr, author of *English Deism: Its Roots and Its Fruits*, outlines the historical connection as well as the point of divergence in how the terms deism and theism have been utilized:

Prior to the 17<sup>th</sup> century the terms (Deism and Deist) were used interchangeably with the terms "theism" and "theist," respectively . . . Theologians and philosophers of the seventeenth century began to give a different signification to the words. . . Both (theists and deists) asserted belief in on supreme God, the Creator. . . and agreed that God is personal and distinct from the world. But the theist taught that god remained actively interested in and operative in the world which he had made, whereas Deists maintained that God endowed the world at creation with self-sustaining and self-acting powers and then abandoned it to the operation of these powers acting as second causes.<sup>38</sup>

In summary, Deists are theistic in the sense that they believe in a higher power responsible for creation. However, they are not Christian because they deny God's miraculous intervention within the created order.

To ensure accuracy it is important that we correctly define our terms. *Webster's 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* offers the following definitions for Deism and Deist:

- *Deism*: The doctrine or creed of a deist; the belief or system of religious opinions of those who acknowledge the existence of one God, but deny revelation: or deism is the belief in natural religion only, or those truths, in doctrine and practice, which man is to discover by the light of reason, independent and exclusive of any revelation from God. Hence deism implies infidelity or a disbelief in the divine origin of the scriptures.

- *Deist*: One who believes in the existence of a God, but denies revealed religion, but follows the light of nature and reason, as his only guides in doctrine and practice; a freethinker.

Utilizing the definitions presented above, Peter A. Lillback, offers the following expanded definition of Deism: “a Deist is one who believes that there is a God, but He is far removed from the daily affairs of men. God made the world and then left it to run on its own. The Deist’s God does not take an active interest in the affairs of men. He is not a prayer-answering God. Praying to Him has no value. Deism is in some ways the natural outworking of the exalting of reason alone—that is, human reason apart from divine revelation.”<sup>39</sup>

### Historical Development

Deistic thinking has existed since antiquity. “Insofar as deism involved a negative destructive criticism of both supernatural revelations and miracles, it springs from the ancient pagan writers like Celsus and Porphyry.”<sup>40</sup> Also fitting Deistic conceptions of the divine was the notion of God as the logos or supreme rational principle that governs the universe as taught by Heraclitus. Likewise, Plato described God as the *Demiurge* or craftsman.

Despite the presence of Deistic ideas in the ancient world, Deism today is best understood as a movement toward natural theology or freethinking that occurred in 17<sup>th</sup>-century Europe. Before 1500, scholars generally decided what was true or false by referring to an ancient Greek or Roman author or to the Bible. Few European scholars challenged the scientific ideas of the ancient thinkers or the church by carefully observing nature for themselves. The publication of *On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Bodies*, by Nicolaus Copernicus in 1543, began a slow process of questioning old assumptions about knowledge. Based on his observations of the movement of planetary bodies, Copernicus concluded that the sun was center of our solar system and not the earth. Later, Johannes Kepler and Galileo Galilei used mathematics to prove that the heliocentric theory postulated by Copernicus was correct. Eventually, the work of Copernicus, Kepler, and Galileo developed into a logical procedure for gathering and testing ideas known as the scientific method under the leadership of Francis Bacon.

Building upon the work of his predecessors, Isaac Newton helped bring together their breakthroughs under a single theory of motion. Newton’s discovery of universal gravitation explained the behavior of objects here on earth and in the heavens. The result was a universe that was controlled by the laws of nature. Theologically, a new way of viewing God emerged. God created the universe to be controlled by natural laws and then retired from the scene just as a watchmaker designs his watch to run on its own. Christian apologist Norman Geisler agrees that this is how modern Deistic concepts emerged. Geisler writes, “. . . a philosophical movement, deism borrowed the theist concept of God and understood it in terms of the mechanistic model (e.g. watchmaker) of the new scientific outline springing from Bacon and others.”<sup>41</sup> Consequently, as the

growing explanatory power of natural law grew, skepticism about the veracity of miracles (i.e. violations of nature law) and books that reported them, such as the Bible increased.

### Basic Tenets of Deism

As with any intellectual movement, there is diversity of belief amongst those who historically have identified themselves as Deists. On the other hand, all Deists do share a commonality of belief on a couple key issues. As we have already seen, a Deist is defined as one who believes there is a God beyond the world who created the world but that the world runs by natural law without supernatural interference.<sup>42</sup> According to Geisler, there are three central tenants of a Deistic worldview, to which we now turn our attention.

“The first premise of a Deistic worldview is that there is a God who crated the universe.”<sup>43</sup> In contrast with atheism, Deists maintain it is necessary to posit a God as the author and architect of the universe because there must be a first cause beyond the natural world who authored all natural processes.<sup>44</sup> Unlike, pantheism which teaches that God is all, Deists maintain that God is separate from his creation. For example, the world is different from God as the painting is from its painter.<sup>45</sup> Just as the painting reflects the nature and attributes of its painter, so too does the creation demonstrate the nature of its designer. In short, Deists view God as eternal, unchangeable, impassable, all-knowing, all-powerful, all-good, true, just, invisible, and infinite.<sup>46</sup> In summary, “there is a God who created, regulates, and sustains the world. And this world is dependent on God, not God on the world.”<sup>47</sup>

“The second major premise of deism is antisupernaturalism.” Simply stated, miracles do not occur. Many Deists argue that a perfect God would not make an imperfect universe that demanded miraculous intervention or repair. Others assert that God set up the laws of the natural world and he cannot (or, will not) violate the laws he established in the natural world.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, since natural laws are immutable, miracles are inconsistent and impossible within the Deistic worldview. Such an insistence magnifies nature of the perfect Mechanic that he made the machine of nature to run without constant need or repair.<sup>49</sup> “For deists all miracle accounts are the result of human intervention or superstition.”<sup>50</sup>

“The third major tenet of Deism is a Unitarian concept of God that involved the denial of the orthodox doctrines of the Trinity and the deity of Christ.”<sup>51</sup> This premise is consistent with the first and flows necessarily from the second. “If no supernatural event occurs then assuredly Christ was not a supernatural being and definitely not Deity incarnate.”<sup>52</sup> Since a denial of the deity of Christ necessitates one also deny the Trinitarian nature of God, Deism is Unitarian in its view of God.

Being a natural religion, Deism maintains that all revelation as well as religions whose truth claims rely on revelation (Christianity) are spurious. While the three tenets discussed above encapsulate the fundamentals of Deistic thinking they are by no means

exhaustive. For example, most Deists hold the following beliefs in some form: the existence of moral law, the good life in accord with natural moral law, and a future life of rewards and punishments.<sup>53</sup>

### Degrees of Deism

As with any philosophical or theological paradigm, people vary in how far they are willing to go in the application of their models' fundamental ideas. According to Peter A. Lillback, there is a difference between hard and soft Deists. Lillback suggests that a Hard Deist not only rejects God's revelation through Scripture but also denies that God acts in history at all. Consequently, Hard Deists reject the notion of God's hearing and answering of prayers. In contrast, Soft Deists believe in prayer and providence but deny the Bible as a revelation from God.<sup>54</sup>

Rather than disguising between Hard and Soft Deists, Norman Geisler recognizes four distinct forms of Deism that center around God's concern for the world and the existence of an afterlife for human beings.<sup>55</sup> These four types of Deism include: *The God of No Concern*, *The God of No Moral Concern*, *The God of Moral Concern for This Life*, and *The God of Moral Concern for This Life and the Next*.

- *The God of No Concern*: The first type of Deism was largely of French origin. According to this view, God is not concerned with governing the world he made. He created the world and set it in motion, but has no regard for what happens to it after that.
- *The God of No Moral Concern*: In this second form of Deism, God is concerned with the ongoing happenings of the world but not with the moral actions of human being. Man can act rightly or wrongly, righteously or wickedly, morally or immorally. It is of no concern to God.
- *The God of Moral Concern for This Life*: The third type of Deism maintains that God governs the world and does care about the moral activity of human beings. Indeed, God insists on obedience to the moral law that God established in nature. However, there is no future after death.
- *The God of Moral Concern to This Life and the Next*: The fourth type of Deism contends that God regulates the world, expects obedience to the moral law grounded in nature, and has arranged for a life after death, with rewards for the good and punishments for the wicked. This view was common among both English and American Deists.<sup>56</sup>

### Conclusion

While modern Deistic groups still exist, even this theistic view waned in popularity under the force of Darwinian evolution. Now that we have identified the basic teachings of the

Pure Grace position and defined the basic tenets of Deism we can direct our attention next week toward answering our fundamental question—are Grace Lifers Deists?

## Grace Lifers Are Not Deists

Now that we have explored the basic beliefs of Grace Lifers and Deists, we are ready to answer the central question possessed by the series of postings — are Grace Lifers Deists? Simply stated, Grace Lifers are **not** Deists. There are many reasons why those who hold the principles of the Pure Grace position are not Deistic in their theology.

First, Grace Lifers as they have been defined in this series of articles, believe in the concept of divine revelation. In addition to God's general revelation through creation,<sup>57</sup> Grace Lifers adhere to the belief that God inspired<sup>58</sup> and preserved<sup>59</sup> every word of Scripture. By holding this position, supporters of the Grace Alternatives are in direct opposition to one of the fundamental tenets of Deism, which asserts that any belief in divine revelation is spurious.

Second, because the Bible is God's revelation to humanity, Grace Lifers believe every single miracle recorded in Scripture. To the author's knowledge, there is not one Pure Grace teacher who doubts or questions the veracity of any miraculous event record in the Bible. In fact, Grace Lifers are emphatic that one must believe in the greatest miracle of all, the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, to receive justification, redemption, and the forgiveness of sins. Once again, the facts demonstrate that the Pure Grace principles stand in direct contrast with the beliefs of Deists.

Third, unlike Deists, Grace Lifers maintain the orthodox belief in the Deity of Jesus Christ. Supporters of the Pure Grace position hold that Jesus Christ was the second member of the Godhead incarnate in human flesh.<sup>60</sup> Logically, it follows then that Grace Lifers would also hold a Trinitarian view of the Godhead unlike the Unitarian view typically espoused by Deists.

The results of our investigation are clear. It is impossible to rightly call Grace Lifers Deists since they are at odds with the fundamental beliefs of a Deistic worldview. Despite this clear testimony, Grace Lifers maintain positions on how God is working in time that may appear Deistic to those who are unfamiliar with them or have chosen not to give the Pure Grace position a fair hearing. Unfortunately, this writer believes one contributing factor is that teachers of the Grace Alternatives have not always articulated their views clearly.

### Grace Life Position on God's Working in Time

Scripture is clear that God created an orderly universe that functions according to natural laws. For example, universal gravitation is responsible for the movement of the planetary bodies through the cosmos. The tilting of the earth on its axis combined with these gravitational relationships has resulted in seasonal changes upon the earth. Genesis 1:14-19 reports these facts:

14) And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for **signs**, and for **seasons**, and for **days**, and **years**:

15) And let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to **give light upon the earth**: and it was so.

16) And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also.

17) And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth,

18) And to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness: and God saw that it was good.

19) And the evening and the morning were the fourth day.

Please note that when God garnished the heavens with the sun, moon, and stars, he placed them in such as fashion to communicate information to the inhabitants of the earth. Specifically, it is by the earth's rotation on its axis that days are counted. Likewise, not only is one revolution of the earth around the sun how we account for years, but it is this earth-sun relationship that also brings about the passing of the seasons. For the Bible believer there can be no doubt that God created an orderly universe that functions in accordance with natural laws that God established.

Grace Lifers, along with the rest of orthodox Christianity, assert that the same God who created the laws upon which creation functions is capable of intervening within them. As stated earlier, supporters of the Grace Alternatives believe every miraculous account of God's intervention recorded in Scripture. The question is not whether God has intervened physically in the past, or even could God intervene miraculously during the dispensation of grace, because the Bible is clear that God has done so in the past. Rather, the real question is whether God works in this fashion today during the church age.

Above all, Grace Lifers believe that God has complete integrity to his word. In this sense God places limits upon his own actions. For example, God certainly still possesses the power to destroy the world again through a flood. However, God promised humanity through the Noahic Covenant that he would not do so.<sup>61</sup> Titus 1:2 states, "In hope of eternal life, **which God, that cannot lie**, promised before the world began." If God exercised his omnipotence to destroy the world through a flood after he promising he would not, God would violate his own word thereby making him a liar. Since Hebrews 6:18 tells us that God cannot lie, a second global flood is clearly not an option for God even though his power to do so has not subsided. Consequently, despite traditional claims to the contrary, God cannot do whatever he wants whenever he wants since he has complete integrity to his word.

As we saw in the second posting in this series, the Pure Grace position holds that God deals with humanity in accordance with the nature of the dispensation that is in effect. During the current dispensation of grace, God is forming a spiritual body of believers in which all physical divisions have been removed.<sup>62</sup> Hence, all the blessings that the body of Christ receives are spiritual in nature according to Ephesians 1:3, "blessed be the God



and Father or our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.” According to Ephesians 1:4-9, believers received the following spiritual blessings the moment they trusted Christ: predestination unto the adoption of children, acceptance in the beloved, redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, wisdom and prudence in abundance, and knowledge of the mystery of his will. Moreover, believers are said to be spiritually seated with Christ in the heavenly places as we wait for the Lord’s return to catch away the church.<sup>63</sup> In short, the salvation and blessings of the body are all spiritual in nature, and our destiny is heavenly in location.

In accordance with the nature of this spiritual body that God is forming in his Son, Paul describes Christ’s relationship with the members of his body in II Corinthians 5:16-17. He writes, “wherefore henceforth **know we no man after the flesh**: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, **yet now henceforth know we him no more**. Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a **new creature**: old things are passed away; behold, **all things are become new**.” Paul teaches that as new creatures in Christ our relationship with Christ is not based upon the flesh. Believers are placed into a living spiritual unity and relationship with the head of the body of Christ. As a result, God’s entire relationship with believers today is based upon their spiritual union with Christ.

Just as God cannot destroy the world again through a flood and maintain his integrity, he also cannot deal with his spiritual body in a fleshly way. It is paramount to realize that when Grace Lifers teach that God does not intervene physically during the dispensation of Grace we are not limiting God’s potential power to work in this fashion. Rather, we are recognizing that God has chosen to work with the body of Christ differently from how he worked with Israel in time past. In short, it is not a question of whether God could work in this fashion but whether He is.

As stated earlier, Grace Lifers are not Deists because they believe every miracle recorded in Scripture. Herein lies the difficulties for those who believe God is still working in a miraculous physical fashion. First, it is not in line with everything Paul teaches about the nature of the body of Christ’s relationship with its head. Second, upon what authority are we to conclude which events can be attributed to God? Without an objective standard outside of ourselves how is one to judge which events in human affairs stem from the hand of God, which from mankind’s own stupidity, and which from the lying wonders of the adversary?

Ultimately, one is left to rely upon human experience and stories rather than upon divine authority. Even the Apostle Peter who was an eyewitness to the events of Christ’s earthly ministry said that he had more confidence in “the sure word of prophecy”<sup>64</sup> than what he saw with his own eyes. Mid-Acts dispensationalists chide the Pentecostal movement for its insistence that divine revelation continues today through the functioning of the sign gifts. This scolding is based upon the notion that none of these so-called “words from God” can be substantiated by the testimony of scripture. Yet, the same people who chide the charismatics practice the same type of unscriptural thinking when it comes to

attributing human events to the sovereign will of God for which they have no scriptural proof.

On the surface this author can see why Grace Lifers have been accused of being Deists. The insistence of the Pure Grace position that God does not intervene physically within creation during the present dispensation does appear to be Deistic. However, such a conclusion fails to understand how God is working in the world today. To be clear, Grace Lifers do believe God cares about his saints and is actively working in the world during the dispensation of Grace. In accordance with the spiritual nature of the body of Christ, God is working today in the inner man of believers as we are conformed to the image of Christ through the written word of God.

The moment a lost sinner places faith in the shed blood of Jesus Christ and his resurrection from the dead as the only complete payment for sin, God the Holy Spirit baptizes that individual into the body of Christ<sup>65</sup> and seals them unto the day of redemption.<sup>66</sup> In Galatians 3:27 Paul writes, “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have **put on Christ.**” Having put on Christ, the believer is instructed to let Christ be formed in them. Again, writing to the Galatians Paul states, “My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be **formed in you.**” It was with great travail and spiritual pain that Paul desired that the Galatians recover themselves from legalistic bondage and allow Christ to be formed in them. This process of spiritual transformation whereby Christ is formed in the believer is one of the reasons why God revealed the mystery of the church age to begin with. Consider Colossians 1:25-27:

- 25) Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God;
- 26) Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints:
- 27) To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; **which is Christ in you**, the hope of glory:

The riches of the mystery is Christ’s desire to be formed in the believer and live his life out through the believer. This is precisely Paul’s point in II Corinthians 4:11, “For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that **the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh.**”

Since our relationship with Christ is not based upon the flesh and since Christ’s desire is to manifest his life through our mortal flesh, it logically follows that God’s working in time would also be spiritual in nature. Notice what Paul teaches about where and how God is working during the dispensation of Grace:

- Ephesians 3:16-20—That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might **by his Spirit in the inner man**; 17) That Christ may **dwell in your hearts by faith**; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, 18) May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length,

and depth, and height; 19) And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God. 20) Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to **the power that worketh in us,**

- Philippians 2:13--For it is God which **worketh in you** both to will and to do of his good pleasure.
- I Thessalonians 2:13—For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, **which effectually worketh also in you that believe.**

The testimony of the preceding verses is clear about where God is working. God is at work on the inner man of the saint to conform him into the image of Christ so that Christ's life can be lived out through the saint's mortal flesh. I Thessalonians 2:13 is equally clear about how this work is being accomplished. The same Holy Spirit that inspired every word of Scripture seals and indwells the believer. When the believer, by faith applies God's written word to the details of his life, the power of the Holy Spirit is released in his inner man.

Today, humanity man does not witness the power of God through miraculous physical interventions. Rather, the power and life of God is demonstrated to the world through the transforming power of the gospel of grace and the working of God's word in the lives of believers. As God's word edifies and changes believers from the inside out, the power of God is on display to a lost and dying world. Remember that God chose to work using signs and wonders with Israel in time past because they required them<sup>67</sup>. How unfortunate it is when mid-Acts dispensationalists who understand the difference between Israel and the body of Christ insist that God is still in practice operating as if Israel's program were still in effect.

In time past Israel was physically very close to the presence of God. The glory of God dwelt between the cherubims on the top of the mercy seat in the tabernacle and later in the temple. Yet, spiritually Israel was far from God. The high priest was only allowed into the presence of God in the holy of holies once a year under penalty of death for violating priestly protocol. How much closer to God are members of the body of Christ to God compared to Israel under the law! Rather than living in the holy of holies, God has chosen the saints as his habitation during the church age. Paul clearly teaches that believers are God's habitation through the spirit:

- I Corinthians 3:16-17—Know ye not that **ye are the temple of God,** and that the **Spirit of God dwelleth in you?** 17) If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, **which temple ye are.**
- I Corinthians 6:19—What? know ye not **that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you,** which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?

- II Corinthians 6:16--And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for **ye are the temple of the living God**; as God hath said, **I will dwell in them**, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.
- Ephesians 2:20-22—And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; 21) In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: 22) In whom **ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit**.

Instead of believing in a God of no concern as the critics of the Pure Grace position have insinuated, Grace Lifers maintain an intimate view of God's relationship and care for his children. Not only has God established a residence within his saints, but he has adopted us and placed us as full adult sons into the family God.<sup>68</sup>

Having been fully justified, redeemed, forgiven, chosen, predestined, sealed, seated, abounded toward in wisdom and prudence, accepted in the beloved, adopted, inhabited, given an inheritance, and blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places what else must God do to demonstrate his intimate love and care for the body of Christ? Grace Lifers do not believe in a Deistic God of no concern. Rather, we believe in a God who established the most intimate relationship possible with his children and actively works in their lives through to power of his written word.

While the body of Christ has received all of the spiritual blessings that Israel is still waiting for, God has asked believers today to wait for the physical redemption of our bodies. Ephesians 1:14 makes clear that the redeemed of God will experience a yet future redemption for which the Holy Spirit has been given as a down payment. Paul writes the following regarding this redemption in Romans 8:22-25:

22) For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.

23) And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, **waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body**.

24) For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?

25) But if we hope for that we see not, **then do we with patience wait for it**.

In exchange for the exalted spiritual position we have been given in Christ, God asks us to wait for the redemption of our bodies. Here in lies our hope. As we groan and travail in this life under the bondage of corruption we have a future assured hope that one day "this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality."<sup>69</sup> The real problem with desiring God's direct physical intervention now is that we are

being impatient. After all if God were to grant us our physical redemption now what would we have to hope for?

### Conclusion

Grace Lifers are not Deists. We do not believe in a God no concern. On the contrary, we believe in a God who has placed us into a loving, living, and active union within himself based on merits of the cross work of Christ. Consequently, we maintain that Christ deals with us not according to the flesh but according to the spirit. Therefore, God works today in the believer through the word of God as it is by faith applied to the details of life. God's work is accomplished today as the life of Christ is made manifest in the mortal flesh of the believer. It is the prayer of this author that all believers will learn to appreciate the riches of God's grace that have already been extended toward us.

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<sup>1</sup> II Corinthians 4:4

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 2:16

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 3:17

<sup>4</sup> Romans 6

<sup>5</sup> I Corinthians 2:13

<sup>6</sup> Luke 1:70, Acts 3:21

<sup>7</sup> Romans 16:25

<sup>8</sup> Ephesians 3:1-5, Colossians 1:25-27

<sup>9</sup> Ephesians 2:13-18

<sup>10</sup> Romans 11:11, 30-32

<sup>11</sup> Romans 11:13

<sup>12</sup> Galatians 1:11-12

<sup>13</sup> Romans 3:24, I Corinthians 15:3-5, Ephesians 2:8-9

<sup>14</sup> Romans 16:25,

<sup>15</sup> Matthew 4:23, 9:25, Mark 1:14-15

<sup>16</sup> Galatians 2:7

<sup>17</sup> I Corinthians 12:13

<sup>18</sup> Ephesians 4:30

<sup>19</sup> Ephesians 1:14, Romans 8:23

<sup>20</sup> I Corinthians 13:8

<sup>21</sup> Ephesians 4:11

<sup>22</sup> Revelation 19

<sup>23</sup> I Thessalonians 4:17

<sup>24</sup> I Corinthians 15:51

<sup>25</sup> Revelation 19-20

<sup>26</sup> C.R. Stam. *Things That Differ*. Introduction.

<sup>27</sup> Galatians 3:28

<sup>28</sup> Ephesians 2:6

<sup>29</sup> Colossians 2:11

<sup>30</sup> Ephesians 2:11

<sup>31</sup> Exodus 15

<sup>32</sup> I Corinthians 1:22, John 4:48, Exodus 4:1-10

<sup>33</sup> Ephesians 1:17, Colossians 1:14

<sup>34</sup> Romans 5:1

<sup>35</sup> Romans 8:23-25

<sup>36</sup> Ephesians 1:14

<sup>37</sup> Thomas Paine (1737-1809) was one of the most militant deists, as he showed in *The Age of Reason* (1794-95). He maintained that the Enlightenment had ended the need for a revealed religion and the age of

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science had come, saying, “The Word of God is The Creation We Behold.” The universe “reveals to man all that is necessary for man to know of God.” He especially despised Christianity, fearing it would threaten a republican government.

“Of all the systems of religion that were ever invented, there is none more derogatory to the Almighty, more unedifying to man, more repugnant to reason, or more contradictory in itself, than this thing called Christianity. Too absurd for belief, too impossible to convince, and too inconsistent for practice, it renders the heart torpid, or produces only atheist and fanatics. As an engine of power, it serves the purpose of despotism; and as a means of wealth, the avarice of priests; but so far as respects the good of man in general, it leads to nothing here or hereafter.” Quoted from: Norman Geisler. *When Skeptics Ask: A Handbook on Christian Evidences*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1990), 40.

<sup>38</sup> James Orr. *English Deism: Its Roots and Its Fruits*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1934), 13.

<sup>39</sup> Peter A. Lillback. *George Washington’s Sacred Fire*. (Bryn Mawr, PA: Providence Forum Press, 2006), 38.

<sup>40</sup> Norman L. Geisler. *Christian Apologetics*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1976), 152.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>45</sup> Norman L. Geisler. *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 190.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

<sup>48</sup> Geisler. *Christian Apologetics*. 167.

<sup>49</sup> Geisler. *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*. 190.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

<sup>51</sup> Geisler. *Christian Apologetics*. 167.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

<sup>53</sup> Geisler. *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*. 190-191.

<sup>54</sup> Lillback. *George Washington’s Sacred Fire*. 38.

<sup>55</sup> Geisler. *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*. 190.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

<sup>57</sup> Romans 1:20

<sup>58</sup> II Timothy 3:16, II Peter 1:21

<sup>59</sup> Psalm 12:6-7

<sup>60</sup> John 1:1-3, 14, Philippians 2:5-8

<sup>61</sup> Genesis 9:11-15

<sup>62</sup> Galatians 3:28

<sup>63</sup> Ephesians 2:6

<sup>64</sup> II Peter 1:16-19

<sup>65</sup> I Corinthians 12:13

<sup>66</sup> Ephesians 4:30

<sup>67</sup> I Corinthians 1:22

<sup>68</sup> Galatians 4:6-7, Romans 8:15-17

<sup>69</sup> I Corinthians 15:53