

Sunday, March 29, 2015—Grace Life School of Theology—*Grace History Project*—Lesson 168  
Conclusion

### **Introduction**

- Bringing the Grace History Project to a close, after five years, is the objective of this lesson. How exactly to do that has proved to be somewhat of a challenge. There are two questions I have received a lot over the past five years: 1) when are you going to end the project? (or – how much further do you intend on going?), and 2) how are you going to end it?
- To the first question I would simply answer as long as it takes. The second has been more difficult to answer. To be frank, I have felt pressure (mostly from myself) to come up with some type of dynamic, climatic ending that people would remember. Similar to what people expect with the final episode of a television series. So I hope this final lesson does not disappoint like the final episode of your favorite sitcom.
- I have chosen a simple approach to this final lesson that will touch up the following areas:
  - Personal thoughts and reflections on the study
  - Overview of key concepts and content
  - Lessons, takeaways, and thoughts moving forward
  - Expressions of gratitude

### **Personal Thoughts and Reflections**

- It was in the spring of 2010, when we finished our study of Galatians that I asked the class how they would feel about me teaching on church history beginning in September when the next school year started. Aside from David, who told me that he did not like history, everyone responded favorably to the idea. So, I took the summer of 2010 to begin preparing for the class beginning in September.
  - For an index of Lessons for the entire project [click here](#).
- [Lesson 1](#) (What is History?) was taught on Sunday, September 12, 2010. When I presented the original [Course Outline](#) for *Church History: A Tale of Two Churches Tracing the Loss and Recovery of Pauline Truth* as part of that first lesson, I had no idea what the course would ultimately become.
- By the end of that first school year (2010/2011), we had reached the Reformation and discussed Luther, Calvin, and the Anabaptists ([Lesson 35](#)) before taking a break for the summer. At the

time, I thought we would resume in September and go until the end of the calendar year (2011) to finish things up.

- Something happened in the summer of 2011 that I did not intend; Brother Mike Marek started loaning me books on the history of dispensational thought in general as well as the writings of specific dispensational writers. It was while reading these books in the summer of 2011 that I began to see a clear progression in the resurgence of Pauline truth. While still not fully aware of where all this would lead, I resolved to tell the story of how the resurgence of Pauline truth followed a generational progression in the writings of men who saw the body of Christ as a mystery committed to the Apostle Paul (When Was the Mystery No Longer a Mystery?).
- It was on Sunday, December 24, 2011 in [Lesson 51 Darby On Trial: Debunking Attacks on the Pre-Trib. Rapture, Part 1](#) that I changed the name of the class to [Grace History Project: Tracing the Abandonment and Resurgence of Pauline Truth from Paul to the Present](#) to more accurately reflect the direction in which the studies were headed.
- From there the rest is history, as they say. The end result of our five years of study together is the setting forth of the most exhaustive recounting of the abandonment and resurgence of Pauline Truth in church history than has heretofore been attempted. Secondly, the Grace History Project (GHP) represents the most comprehensive history of the Grace Movement, its precursors, as well as its effects and impacts available. That being said, I am keenly aware that, despite my best efforts for completeness, the project is still woefully inadequate and incomplete. There are major sections of church history that merit further investigation and research. The processes of Historical Theology still needs to be brought to bear on the following:
  - Further research on the dispensational teaching of Plymouth Brethren writers of the 1800s.
  - Theological development in the writings of Bultema, Baker, Schütz, Stam, and others.
  - The many grace ministries and brethren that we did not include in the project: Bob Hill, Les Feldick, Lee Homoki and Bible Doctrines to Live By, and a host of other men and ministries.
  - The Grace Movement in the south and the reach and impact of E.C. Moore.
- The GHP represents a graduate level course in church history from a mid-Acts Pauline vantage point. Researching and drafting each lesson was equivalent to writing a graduate paper every week for the past five years. I have often been asked how I was able to accomplish this amidst the rigors of family, ministry, and work responsibilities. My answer is simple, time management, study strategies, research methodologies, and discipline gleaned from my graduate work in military history.

- While the bulk of the project is coming to an end, I will not stop being interested in historical theology and church history especially as it relates to grace doctrine and the grace movement. I am already planning at least one addendum lesson for a future time and will not hesitate to share new insight or correct wrong information in the light of new discoveries and research. In short, although the main portion of the project is ending, my mind continues to ponder things and future additional lessons are a virtual certainty.
- For good or bad, the GHP has become something of a defining project for me personally and our assembly collectively. These lessons are being shared and enjoyed by saints all over the world. For example, there is a blog site in the United Kingdom where the YouTube videos are being shared and discussed. Because of this project I was honored with being asked to speak at the April pastors' conference in Chicago by Pastor Jordan for the first time. In addition, through the project I reconnected with Dr. Dale DeWitt and partnered with him to write a series of articles on J.C. O'Hair for *Truth Magazine*. A full length, co-authored book (by me and Dr. DeWitt) on O'Hair is also in the works for some time in 2016. The GHP has also expanded the impact and reach of Grace Life Bible Church. This expansion has benefited the church financially as faithful saints who have benefited from the project have chosen to support the church financially.
- Looking forward, I have been approached by many about turning the notes into a full length, possibly multivolume, church history book (or series) written from the perspective of Pauline truth. I have a meeting next month with Dr. DeWitt to discuss strategies for how to accomplish that potential goal. Brother Jonny Vargesse from Shorewood Bible Church has approached me about adding all the video to his Indian grace website that he is using the reach his homeland of India with the message of grace.

### **Overview of Key Concepts and Content**

- The entire history of the dispensation of Grace, otherwise known as church history, needs to be judged through the prism of Pauline truth. The epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Gentiles, i.e., Romans through Philemon are the standard by which the rightness or wrongness of every doctrine, practice, group, or movement in church should be judged.
- This is true for both our doctrine and our practice. Paul established independent, self-sufficient, self-governed local churches. The true history of the church cannot be found in tracing the collation of political and religious power in the establishment of unscriptural hierarchical entities, i.e., Roman Catholicism.
- II Timothy 1:15—Pauline truth was not lost, it was willfully abandoned. Once the Pauline pattern was laid aside and individual local churches lost sight of Paul's doctrine and ministry pattern, the entire Roman Catholic system was present within three generations after Paul's death.
- Early on in our studies together ([Lesson 7](#)) I presented the following chart by [Fredric Lewis](#). *While I still agree with the general concept presented by Brother Lewis in the chart below, I have come to some different understandings as a result of my studies. My disagreements center*

*around the use of the terminology Lost/Loss and Recovered/Recovery. I prefer the terminology abandoned/abandonment and resurgent/resurgence. Moreover, there are many names missing from the second half of the chart that should be added for the sake of completeness.*

### **Pauline Truths Lost (Order of Loss)**

First—The Distinctive Message and Ministry of the Apostle Paul

Second—The Pre-Tribulational Rapture of the Church the Body of Christ

Third—The Difference Between Israel and the Church, the Body of Christ

Fourth—Justification by Grace Through Faith Alone, in Christ Alone

### **Pauline Truths Recovered (Order of Recovery)**

First—*Justification by Grace Through Faith Alone, in Christ Alone*—Recovered via the Protestant Revolution in the 16th century via Luther and others.

Second—*The Difference Between Israel and the Church, the Body of Christ*—Recovered in the 1800's via John Nelson Darby, E.W. Bullinger, Sir Robert Anderson and others.

Third—*The Pre-Tribulational Rapture of the Church, the Body of Christ*—Recovered in the 19th Century via John Nelson Darby and included and popularized by C.I. Scofield in his Reference Bible in 1909.

Fourth—*The Distinctive Message and Ministry of the Apostle Paul*—Recovered from the middle of the 1900's via J.C. O'Hair, Charles F. Baker, Cornelius R. Stam and others. (Lewis, 1)

- Departing Paul's pattern doctrinally as well as practically, i.e., independent local church based ministry, has proved devastating to the body of Christ. All the doctrinal and ecclesiastical confusion observable in Christendom is the result of abandoning Pauline authority and the mixing of God's program and dealings with Israel with Paul's instruction to the body of Christ in Romans to Philemon.
- Groups of believers who clung to Paul's teaching have always existed in varying degrees of doctrinal soundness throughout church history. These believers were branded and persecuted as heretics by an apostate unscriptural hierarchical state church. Heresy is not to be judged by the writings of the church fathers (most of whom were heretics themselves) or the rulings of church councils but on the immutable and unerring standard of Paul's epistles.
- Groups such as the Paulicians, Bogomils, Cathars, Waldensians, Lollards, and Husites held forth the light of truth during the Catholic Middle Ages and paid the price for having done so. These believers along with their writings were snuffed out to any extent possible by the state church. Much of what is "known" of them comes from the writings of their enemies.
- Martin Luther and the Protestant Revolution (Reformation) restored an awareness of the doctrine of justification by grace through faith within the church. Our study of the post-Reformation time period witnessed a slow resurgence in Pauline truth as more and more writers began to note God's dispensational dealings with man throughout the Bible. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the pace quickened as men such as Darby, Trotter, Holden, and Mackintosh understood that the church the

body of Christ was a mystery unknown in the scripture (hid in God) until it was revealed to the Apostle Paul.

- By 1900 the mid-Acts position was arguably in print with E.W. Bullinger's arguing that Acts 13 was a "dispensational epoch" in his 1895 book *The Mystery: Secret Truth Revealed*. In addition, to studying the emergence of the Acts 28 dispensational position in the early half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century we also covered the precursors to the formation of the Grace Movement in the United States: the Niagara Bible Conference, the Scofield Reference Bible, the early dispensational witness of H.A. Ironside, Lewis Sperry Chafer, and the founding of Dallas Theological Seminary.
- Our study on the origins of the Grace Movement in the United States began with a consideration of the excommunications of Harry Bultema and Peter Stam (C.R. Stam's father) from various reformed denominations on account their affinity for and acceptance of dispensational theology.
- Much time was spent tracing the theological development in the writings of J.C. O'Hair as the fountainhead of the Grace Movement in the United States. We noted O'Hair's flirtation with Acts 28ism for a time between 1933 and 1935 as well as his first articulation of a clear mid-Acts view that the body of Christ began before Paul wrote Romans in Acts 20 in his 1938 book *God's Reign of Grace for the Human Race*.
- In addition, we considered the formal organization of the Grace Movement in the United States. First with the World Wide Grace Testimony in 1939 and later the formation of the Grace Gospel Fellowship (GGF) in 1944/45. The Neo-Evangelical controversy of the 1950s and 1960s was studied as the back drop for the fragmentation of the Grace Movement in the late 1960s into opposing groups GGF and BBF (Berean Bible Fellowship), both of which viewed themselves as the true successors of O'Hair's ministry.
- Further multiplication by division was covered by looking at the life and ministry of Pastor C. Richard Jordan and the formation of Grace School of the Bible in the 1980s. It was Brother Jordan and his companions that took a firm stand for the authority of the King James Bible and applied the Pauline dispensationalism of O'Hair, Stam, and Baker to new frontiers such as: the confession of sins (I John 1:9), total forgiveness, the will of God, prayer, and intervention. This willingness to take Grace Theology to its logical conclusion resulted in new understandings of how God works in time and came to be known as the Grace Alternatives or the Grace Life.
- More recently, much time was spent on a consideration of the origin, teachings and impact of Sonship Edification (SE) as a system of theology within the Grace Movement in the last fifteen years. It is the view of the GHP that SE has undone many of the advancements made in the understanding and application of grace in favor of a system of works based sanctification.

### **Lessons, Takeaways, and Thoughts Moving Forward**

- In [Lesson 4](#) (The Challenge of Church History), I presented the following charts regarding the cycles of church history identified in Peter S. Ruckman's *The History of the New Testament*

*Church, Vol. I.* While I generally do not endorse the writings of Peter Ruckman for a host of reasons, I find his point on this matter sound. When it comes to the study of church history, Ruckman sees two cycles at work that repeat themselves often enough to be considered a law of history that operates independent of anyone's knowledge of it.

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| <i>Preaching</i> —may also be called Evangelism   | <i>A Man</i> —this involves the preaching and evangelization  |
| <i>Teaching</i> —which may stand for Education  | <i>A Movement</i> —this involves the setting up of teaching facilities and institutions   |
| <i>Culture</i> —which means the introduction of science, philosophy, and tradition (Col. 2:8) into the teaching | <i>A Machine</i> —this involves regimentation and patterning the system after the world's system of education (colleges and universities)   |
| <i>Apostasy</i> —includes ecumenical overtures (compromise) with pagan religious systems or unsaved people      | <i>A Monument</i> —this means the Holy Spirit has departed, abandoning the institution to paganism; discipline and academic standards are substituted for the liberty and power of the Holy Spirit. |
| <i>Paganism</i> —which means the original condition the populace was in before they were “evangelized.”         | <i>A Morgue</i> —there is no shred of the movement left   |

- Moving forward we need to be pitching doctrinal tents not erecting fixed structures. Tents can be picked up and moved if further study and research of God's word rightly divided indicate that they should be. In contrast, building fixed doctrinal structures imply that a group is functioning with a fixed mind set and views themselves as already possessing all the truth. This is a grave mistake because it results in the defense of the entrenched institutional structure instead of allowing the freedom of thought to follow the evidence to the soundest conclusion possible.
- While a growth mindset is imperative, it also carries with it an inherent danger. If it is so open that it fails to test every point of doctrine, belief, and/or practice by the standard of God's word rightly divided, then it has overstepped its bounds. We need to strike the delicate balance between protecting the amount of truth that we currently possess and being open to refining our understanding as needed.
- If there is anything we have learned from the GHP, it is that forsaking the Pauline pattern in either doctrine or practice results in disaster. This is just as true today as it was in the first century.
- As Pauline grace believers, our most intense battles moving forward are going to be of the Acts 20:30 variety that come from within our own ranks as people depart various aspects of Pauline truth and practice for their own advantage and gain. Given the internal nature of these conflicts, not only will the doctrinal errors be more difficult to detect, but the fallout will be more devastating. Some examples include the following:

- *House Church*—the notion that it is wrong to meet in any another other building other than a house.
  - *Rapture*—the body of Christ is going through part or all of Daniel’s 70<sup>th</sup> week.
  - *New Reconciliationism*—is the teaching that people die and go to hell with their sins forgiven. This teaching takes an individual view of II Corinthians 5:19 and maintains that the entire world has already been reconciled to God and had their sins forgiven.
    - “Do People Go to Hell With Their Sins Forgiven? Investigating the Claims of the New Reconciliationists” [YouTube Video](#), or [PDF Notes](#)
  - *Sonship Edification*—in all its permutations and their related systems of performance based sanctification.
- Lastly, the issue of final authority should not be overlooked. In my opinion there is a direct correlation between an individual’s and/or group’s attitude towards the final authority of the King James Bible and their doctrinal soundness and stance for Pauline truth. Individuals and groups that have unequivocally embraced modern versions and their underlying textual theories have struggled to maintain a clear and consistent Pauline witness. Meanwhile, those who use the King James Bible but merely prefer it, have fared marginally better in terms of maintaining their stance for Pauline truth. In short, there seems to be a direct relationship to one’s stance on the Bible issue and their ability to maintain a consistent and uncompromised dispensational position. In fairness, the mere act of believing the King James Bible is God’s word for English speaking people does not protect one from doctrinal error as we have seen in our study of Sonship Edification.
    - GGF/GBC—supports and endorses modern versions.
    - BBF/BBS—prefers the King James but does not stand for its final authority for English speaking people.
    - GSB—holds the King James to be God’s word for English speaking and the believer’s final authority.
  - The great resurgence in Pauline truth we have studied in the GHP was led by skillful Bible students who were supported finically by likeminded members of the body of Christ. It was this financial support that allowed men such as Bullinger, O’Hair, and Jordan (in the present) to devote their time and attention to the creation of Bible study resources and materials that will continue to impact and influence the body of Christ for years to come. There is an opportunity for those who are financially inclined to impact the body of Christ for years to come via their monetary support of productive grace ministries.

## Expressions of Gratitude

- To wrap things up I would like to thank the following people for helping me along the way and serving to make the project a success.
  - My Wife—for supporting me and putting up with my face being in a book and my mind on other things. I could not have done this without her support.
  - My Sons—for being a wonderful distraction and making fun of Dad talking about Bullinger and O’Hair all the time.
  - Class Participants—without all of you, there would have been no class. Thank you for your patience and support as the project took on a life of its own. How many times did I change the end date? Many within the greater body of Christ will benefit on account of your support of this project.
  - Virtual Helpers—to the host of people from cyberspace that helped me with various aspects of the research for the project. You know who you are (many expressed that they did not want their names mentioned when I approached them) and your input and assistance is appreciated more than you know.
  - Sylvia and Mike Erspamer—for proof reading and editing my notes and making the photo copies every week.
  - David Ammeraal—for helping with the photo copies, running the camera, and making sure the projector and equipment was set up when I needed it.
  - Norm Price—for faithfully recording and uploading all the videos to YouTube every week.
  - Kurt Hendrickson—for faithfully uploading the MP3 audio as well as the PDF notes and PowerPoints to the church website.
  - Rani Marek—for being my first editor and proof reader for the first year or so of the project.
  - Mike Marek—no other person had a greater impact upon the direction and content of the course than Brother Marek. There were times when I told Mike that I thought he should be teaching the course given his depth of knowledge. His generosity to loan me books and assist with various aspects of the research were critical to the success of the project. His gracious unseen hand is all over the content of the course.