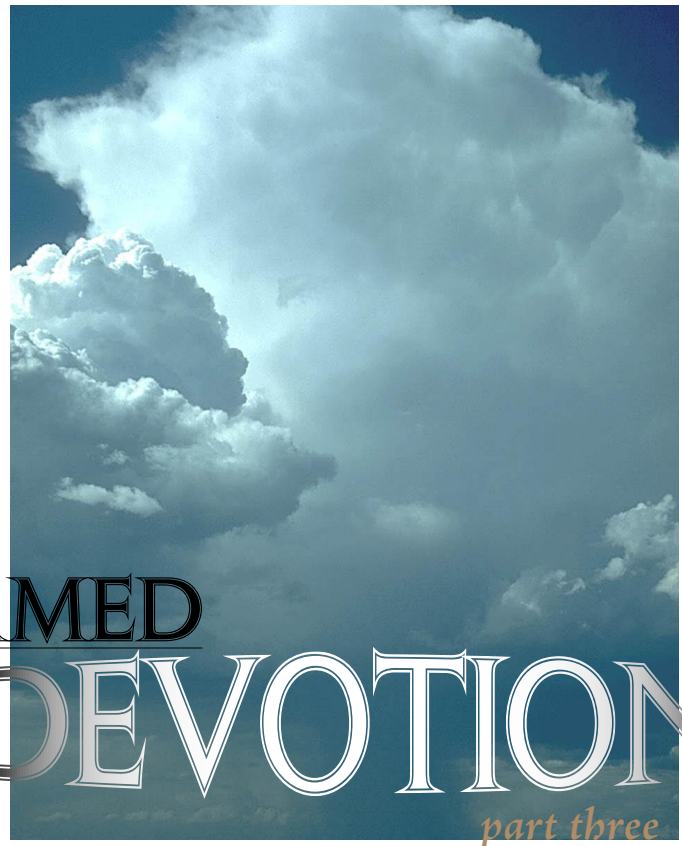


"Who is this that darkens counsel
By words without knowledge?
Now gird up your loins like a man,
And I will ask you, and you instruct Me!
Where were you when I laid the
foundation of the earth?
Tell Me, if you have understanding."

Job 38:2-4

Your hands made me and fashioned me;
Give me understanding, that I may
learn Your commandments.

Psalms 119:73



AN INFORMED DEVOTION

part three

IT MAY BE ONE OF THE more common stumbling blocks to Christianity. The unregenerate mind cannot fathom that the same God who created the universe—if, indeed, it believes He did that at all—is also responsible for every new life born into this small world. They cannot believe that a universal God can also be personal; in their minds, the two are incompatible, so, choosing one, they reject the intimacy of Christ.

The informed believer, on the other hand, knows that God is personal, without His creative might being in the least diminished. In fact, it is precisely that supernatural juxtaposition that defines “grace.” Grace is a God—who doesn’t have to—loving me. Grace is a God inventing the universe, but also inventing me.

Grace is love undeserved.

Grace is the good pleasure of God that inclines Him to bestow benefits upon the undeserving. Grace takes its rise far back in the heart of God, in the awful and incomprehensible abyss of His holy being; but the channel through which it flows out to men is Jesus Christ, crucified and risen.

A.W. Tozer

OWNERSHIP

“Who has given to Me that I should repay him?
Whatever is under the whole heaven is Mine.”

Job 41:11

For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him.

Colossians 1:16

There are two principal facets to God’s ownership of the believer’s life. First, because we were purchased at the cross—which means that He owns us lock-stock-and-barrel—He may do with us as He pleases, without seeking our approval.

If I borrow a friend’s car, I would ask his permission before doing certain

things to it. I may go ahead and add oil to the engine, or refill his gas tank, but I certainly wouldn't have the car repainted in chartreuse without first obtaining his permission. I may wash and wax it before returning it to him, but I certainly wouldn't have the seats reupholstered in striped fabric of candy apple red interspersed with deep purple—not if I valued his friendship, that is.

But if I *owned* the car—if I were the one who had written out the check for its purchase—then I would feel free to do whatever I pleased with the car. I could have it painted any obnoxious color of my choosing, or upholster the seats in whatever offensive fabric I could find. I could cash it in for scrap metal, or park it in the garage for twenty years. It would be mine.

The second facet to His ownership is that, having paid a high price for us, God cherishes His possession. When I spend only a small amount to purchase a cheap, plastic tool, I care little if it breaks or is lost. I simply shrug off the loss and buy another. But when I spend a great amount to buy a finely crafted, expensive tool, I take very good care of it indeed. I protect it, clean it after each use, and make sure I return it to its spot in the toolbox after each use. If I accidentally break the expensive tool, I repair it; if I lose it, I search high and low until it is found.

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20

The world rebels against God's Lordship. It mistakenly refers to slavery under evil as "liberty," and servanthood under a merciful God as "slavery." But through the ministry and counsel of the Spirit, the believer understands that true liberty comes only by the hand of God, and true peace comes only by accepting Him as Lord and Master of one's life.

And I will walk at liberty,
For I seek Your precepts.

Psalms 119:45 nkjv

REMOVING DEATH

He will swallow up death for all time,
And the Lord God will wipe tears away from all faces,
And He will remove the reproach of His people from all the earth;
For the Lord has spoken.

Isaiah 25:8

This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

2 Timothy 1:9b-10 NIV

Sometimes, as a mental and spiritual exercise, I try to imagine death: How could I best describe the state of death? Modern man treats death all too lightly—treating it either as simply the cessation of existence, or as something so nominally unpleasant that it can be dismissed as insignificant.

But when I think of death—God's definition of death—I think about Adam and Eve. Here were two people who enjoyed a unique, blissful communion with their Creator. As no one has since, they spent pleasant hours with Him, walking the garden paths, learning from Him, listening to His voice, and enjoying His company. But then, through their own weakness and greed, they lost it all. And for the first time they experienced separation from their Lord.

"Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."

So the Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

Genesis 3:17b-19,23-24 NIV

If we consider death as a state of separation from God, then Jesus experienced the ultimate death. For when Christ took upon

Himself all the sins of mankind in one moment, because He, in His purity, could not bear the nearness of such impurity, God the Father rejected His own Son who wore it. And that moment was for Christ the ultimate death.

At the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" which is translated, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

Mark 15:34

But His death removed its curse for us. And because death has been vanquished, the believer cannot escape grace. It is there, at the beginning, giving us entrance into the fellowship of God. And God's graceful ways—His gentle kindness—pervade every moment and aspect of living within that fellowship—a fellowship from which we can never be removed.

BELOW THE SURFACE

Once we dare to dive below the insubstantial surface in our relationship to God, we come to understand that when we were there, skipping lightly over the profound truth of who He is, we really didn't know Him at all.

No wonder our devotion had been so thin.

True joy in *any* relationship is found in the investment of time and effort toward intimacy. And never more so than in our relationship with sovereign God.