



~ Thought For The Day ~

~gathering from the 4 winds~

“come just as you are”

Refresh, Restore, Rebuild = Healing



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Worship Music

Prayer

Lord, I want my heart and mouth to say the right things. I know I need to spend more time filling my heart and mind with Your Word. I also know I need to be speaking positive confessions about myself my family, my business, my future, my health, and every other area of my life. Your Word has the promises I need for every sphere of my life, so I ask You to help me fill my heart with the truth and line up my mouth with what Your Word promises for my life. For we are to love our neighbor as our self, and that includes family, friends and business. Lord fill me with whom to bless daily and whom to pray for, in Jesus' name. Amen....

Sparkling Gems from the Greek.

[Why-Crystal Lewis](#)

[For Such A Time As This-Crystal Lewis](#)

[I Will Go-Crystal Lewis](#)

[I Still Believe-Crystal Lewis](#)

[People Get Ready-Crystal Lewis](#)

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[“ Love Listens Before Judgement Jumps ”—Bob Coy](#)

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If you have a prayer request...please e-mail it to us so we can pray for you...or a person.....

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Deuteronomy 10:1-22 (AMP)

1 AT THAT time the Lord said to me, Hew two tables of stone like the first and come up to Me on the mountain and make an ark of wood. 2 And I will write on the tables the words that were on the first tables which you broke, and you shall put them in the ark. 3 So I [Moses] made an ark of acacia wood and hewed two tables of stone like the first, and went up the mountain with the two tables of stone in my [one] hand. 4 And the Lord wrote on the tables as at the first writing, the Ten Commandments which the Lord had spoken to you on the mountain out of the midst of the fire on the day of the assembly; and the Lord gave them to me. 5 And I turned and came down from the mountain and put the tables in the ark which I had made; and there they are, as the Lord commanded me. 6 (The Israelites journeyed from the wells of the sons of Jaakan to Moserah. There Aaron died, and there he was buried, and Eleazar his son ministered in the priest's office in his stead. 7 From there they journeyed to Gudgodah, and then to Jotbathah, a land of brooks [dividing the valley]. 8 At that time the Lord set apart the tribe of Levi to bear the ark of the covenant of the Lord, to stand before the Lord to minister to Him and to bless in His name unto this day. 9 Therefore Levi has no part or inheritance with his brethren; the Lord is his inheritance, as the Lord your God promised him.) 10 And I [Moses] stayed on the mountain, as the first time, forty days and nights, and the Lord listened to me at that time also; the Lord would not destroy you. 11 And the Lord said to me, Arise, journey on before the people, that they may go in and possess the land which I swore to their fathers to give to them. 12 And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you but [reverently] to fear the Lord your God, [that is] to walk in all His ways, and to love Him, and to serve the Lord your God with all your [mind and] heart and with your entire being, 13 To keep the commandments of the Lord and His statutes which I command you today for your good? 14 Behold, the heavens and the heaven of heavens belong to the Lord your God, the earth also, with all that is in it and on it. 15 Yet the Lord had a delight in loving your fathers, and He chose their descendants after them, you above all peoples, as it is this day. 16 So circumcise the foreskin of your [minds and] hearts; be no longer stubborn and hardened. 17 For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, the terrible God, Who is not partial and takes no bribe. 18 He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger or temporary resident and gives him food and clothing. 19 Therefore love the stranger and sojourner, for you were strangers and sojourners in the land of Egypt. 20 You shall [reverently] fear the Lord your God; you shall serve Him and cling to Him, and by His name and presence you shall swear. 21 He is your praise; He is your God, Who has done for you these great and terrible things which your eyes have seen. 22 Your fathers went down to Egypt seventy persons in all, and now the Lord your God has made you as the stars of the heavens for multitude.

Deuteronomy 9–10. Israel's Persistent Rebellion

Three times over, Israel is reminded that God's wondrous dealings with them were not because they were so righteous (9:4–6)—they had been a rebellious and stubborn people all the way.

(Halley's Bible Handbook; Henry Halley; 2000; Zondervan; Bible History and Commentaries; page 177)

Chapter 10

In chapter ten He continues of their failures during the wilderness experiences. And he's reminding them of the failure at the time when God had given to him the law on the two tables of stone. And how that when he came down from the mountain that the people had made this golden calf and were worshipping it and how the tables of stone were broken. And so he was commanded by the Lord to take two more tables of stone. And for another forty days and forty nights in fasting without water or bread there on the mount before God.

And God wrote on the tables, according to the first writing, the ten commandments [verse four] in the mount in the midst of the fire; and the LORD gave them unto me (Deu 10:4).

And so how that the Lord led them. And then in verse twelve; the question,

And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee (Deu 10:12),

This is a question that every one of us should be concerned with: What does God require of me? As soon as I conclude in my mind that God does exist, and let me suggest that it's much easier to believe that God exists than to not believe that God exists. I don't know how many of you saw that sunrise this morning; oh, it was absolutely glorious. I don't see how anybody could look at that sun rise and not believe that God exists. When you start thinking of the whole process of the universe and you start thinking of the processes of life, it's much easier to believe that God exists than not to believe that God exists.

So, when you come to the conclusion that God exists and that conclusion is easily derived at when you look at man and you realize all of the intricacies that make up just the first cell of man and you see our capacities, you realize that God exists because no one but God could create an instrument such as our body except one who has all wisdom and all knowledge; an omniscient God.

Now if God created me He must have created me for a purpose. Therefore, what does God require of me? I don't believe that God would have just created man and just said, "Here you are and now you're on your own". That having been created by God I have certain obligations and responsibilities to my Creator. What are they?

Hear, O Israel, this is what the LORD require of you, to reverence the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul. To keep the commandments of the LORD, and his statutes, which I command you this day for thy good? (Deu 10:12-13)

Well, that's pretty heavy. What does God require? That you reverence Him, that you walk in all of His ways, that you love Him and serve Him with all your heart and all your soul. You say, "Well, I failed in that. What now?" That you keep all of His commandments, you walk in all of His ways, that you reverence Him. We haven't done it.

As the Bible said, "We've all sinned and come short of the glory of God"(Romans 3:23). Does that mean that it's all over, there is no hope for me? No. God has an alternate plan because man was not able to fulfill God's requirement and this is God's ideal requirement, this is how God would have you to live and God would have every man to live. And let me suggest if every man lived according to this requirement we'd have one fantastic, beautiful world. If every man was walking in the ways of God, loving God, loving each other as they love themselves and walking in full harmony of God, what a fabulous world this could be. But man failed. And rather than reverencing God, man so often blasphemes God. Rather than loving and serving, man is rebelling against Him. And we also fail to walk in all of His ways and to love and serve Him as we should. So does that mean we're lost, there's no hope? No.

In the New Testament they came to Jesus with a question "What must we do to do the works of God?" Same idea: "What does God require of us?" "What must we do to do the works of God?" And Jesus said, "This is the work of God: that you believe on him whom he hath sent"(John 6:29). Praise the Lord, I can do that. Though I failed in the ideal requirement, yet I can now fulfill the actual requirement of God. What does God actually require of me tonight? That I believe in His Son Jesus Christ. All right, I can handle that. Now to me it's fabulous that that's what God requires of me. That I just believe in the provisions that He has made for my sin by sending His Son. "Believe in him whom he hath sent".

Now, as I believe in Jesus Christ, I receive a new dynamic for life. For Christ comes in and begins to indwell me, and as he comes in and indwells me, He, by his indwelling power and presence begins to give me the strength, the ability to live according to God's divine ideal. He gives me now the strength to walk in the ways of righteousness. He gives me now the love that I need for God. He begins to work now in me doing for me what I couldn't do for myself.

You see, God hasn't really given up on the divine ideal but now He, through Christ, is giving me the capacity to fulfill the divine ideal, but I have fulfilled God's requirement for me the moment I believed in Jesus Christ. The moment I committed my life to Him, I fulfilled God's requirement for me. So we look at God's ideal requirement in the Old Testament and we realize that we've all failed so we come to the New Testament and we find that we can all handle God's actual requirement for us tonight just to believe on Him whom He has sent.

Now he reminds them,

Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens is the LORD's thy God, the earth also, with all that therein is (Deu 10:14).

Everything belongs to God. Look at the universe, it all is His. The heaven of heavens belongs to God. That's the whole universe out there with its billions of galaxies. We read in the Psalms, "The earth is the LORD and the fullness thereof and all they that dwell therein here is declared that the earth also, with all that therein is"(Psalms 24:1). Everything that's in this whole thing actually belongs to God. But Satan has usurped that which belongs to God and has taken control of it. But Jesus came to redeem it back to God and paid the price of redemption so that one day very soon, very, very soon God is gonna lay claim to that which Jesus purchased almost two thousand years ago. Soon it's gonna be God's again.

Technically it is now, Jesus already paid the price but Satan is still usurping the authority and the power ruling over the world. But before long Jesus is gonna come and set one foot upon the land and one foot upon the sea and declare "that the kingdoms of this world have now become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ"(Revelation 11:15). And He's gonna take His power and He's going to rule and then you'll see the world that God intended when He created it.

People get awfully confused today because they look around at the world that they see today and they think, "Well, how can a God of love create this mess? How can a God of love allow the Cambodian situation, the starving children? How can a God of love allow children to be born deformed?" Right now the world is in rebellion against God. You don't see the world that God intended, God wants, God plans. You see the world that is suffering, the fruit of its rebellion. But one of these days Jesus is coming to establish God's kingdom and He's gonna rule over the earth and in that day you'll see the world that God intended: a world that is without sickness, a world that is without suffering, a world that is without pain, a world that is without any deformities. There will be no blind, no lame, no deaf, no dumb. You'll see the world God intended. I can hardly wait.

You know people, when you start talking about, you know, the end of the world as we know the end of the world is going to be, not really you know, the big gigantic atomic holocaust and that's the end of the world and there's just this radioactive cloud hovering over it and that's all. That isn't what we're looking for as Christians at all. We're looking for the end of the Komanis—wait a minute you may not want to clap, and the Carters. Thank you. And all of men who have attempted to rule over men and have failed.

We're looking for a King to come who will reign in righteousness over the earth and will establish a true righteousness over the earth. And men will live together in peace and "they will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks and they'll study war no more" (Micah 4:3). And men will live together in righteousness, in peace. And there will not be a hungry person on the face of the earth when men divert his military budgets to agricultural development. And that's exactly what the prophet says is gonna happen. A world without greed, a world where the strong do not oppress the weak, where the rich do not oppress the poor, but we're all love and experience the joy, the presence of God dwelling with men. What's so bad about that?

I'll tell you what to me would be a doomsday message would be to say, "Brethren, brace yourself. You gotta go on in this mess, there's no way out". That to me would be a doomsday prophet. But declare that this mess is soon coming to an end is not a doomsday message at all, it's a message of glory, it's a message of hope and that's the message that I have to bare to you from God's word. Thank God that we're coming soon to the end of the chaos that man has created upon the earth and we're gonna see the establishment of God's righteous kingdom. "The heaven of heavens of God the earth is Lord, everything that is in it" and he's gonna lay claim to it very soon. Only the LORD had a delight in your fathers to love them, and he chose their seed after them, even you. Therefore, you've been stiffnecked, [you've been rebellious, but now he declares] circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart (Deu 10:15-16). Now the right of circumcision was given to Abraham and it was intended as a spiritual thing. The idea was that you were cutting off the flesh life. You weren't to live after the flesh; you were to live after the spirit. And it was the mark of a people who were to be a spiritual people or people who were spiritually orientated and spiritually minded in contrast to the natural man of the world who is always materialistically minded and mindful of his physical material needs. God's people weren't to be a people dominated by the materialistic things, by the fleshly things. They were to be a people that were dominated by spiritual things and the sign of that spiritual covenant with God was circumcision.

Now, they kept the covenant in a physical way but not in a spiritual way. And Paul brings out the whole inconsistency of the ritual apart from the reality. And it's possible for people today to have certain religious rituals but not have any reality of a relationship with God, going through the rituals, going through the motions. And that was the church of Ephesus, they were still going through the motions but they didn't have the emotion. Jesus said, "You've left your first love"(Revelation 2:4). And it's very possible today for people to be in the same state as the children of Israel, in which they were depending upon the outward ritual when in reality, God was interested in the inward work that's in the heart. And so He said, "circumcise therefore the flesh of your heart". And Paul picks this up in Romans the second chapter and says, "The true circumcision is not of the flesh but of the heart". My heart alienated from a life of the flesh, my heart no longer longing after the things of the flesh but a heart that is now after God. And as David, "as the deer panteth after the water brooks so panteth my soul after thee O God" (Psalms 42:1). My soul thirsteth for Thee as in a dry and a parched land. Oh, that's the kind of people God is looking for; those who are spiritually-minded, spiritually oriented, who are thirsting after God in their heart and in their life and wanting to live a spiritual life that is dedicated unto Him. So the encouragement towards the spiritual life.

For the LORD your God is a God of gods, he is the LORD of lords, a great God mighty, and awesome (Deu 10:17). The word terrible is an archaic word as far as our language goes. It means awesome, which regards not person, nor takes reward (Deu 10:17).

The word terrible has had a change of meaning through usage in the English language since the King James translation. And so the word you would better translate it "awesome". We think of terrible, as, you know something that is tragic, horrible, grotesque. Right? But it's archaic. So "awesome" God. Now love therefore the stranger and reverence the LORD thy God; him shalt thou serve, to him shalt thou cleave, and swear by his name. He is thy praise, he is thy God, he has done for thee these great and awesome things, which your eyes have seen (Deu 10:19-21). So the encouragement to reverence God, serve God, praise God, love God, turn your lives over to God. (Through The Bible; C 2000 Series; Chuck Smith; 1979-1986)

Some time ago I attended a pastor's luncheon in Oregon. Before the program began, someone asked if I had heard about the hitchhiker who spoke about the Lord's return and then vanished. I told him yes, I had. Only the first time I had heard about it was way back in 1944 in Burbank, California. The story always had the same ending. The couple who picked up the hitchhiker pull into a service station only to hear the attendant tell them they are the ninth customers that day with the same story. The pastor who questioned me laughed and said, "That shows you how remote Oregon is - it took 50 years for this rumor to get here!" How prone we are to getting all worked up over things that amount to nothing! And how grateful I am that our faith is based on the firm foundation of the Word of God. I would much prefer that the Lord speak to me from the tried and true pages of Scripture than to receive some kind of supernatural, special revelation. If even an angel came to me claiming to have some revolutionary truth, I would find myself questioning whether his message was of God. Endless second-guessing is not a problem when we turn to the Word. The Bible is the only firm foundation for our faith and Christian walk. When our lives are founded on the truth of God's Word, we won't be carried away by the latest doctrinal fad or "new and improved" version of the gospel. How crucial it is that we stand fast on the truth of God's Word! This is the only way to maintain the glorious liberty provided to us so abundantly in Christ. How Can We Stand Fast? It is important to understand that those who fail to stand fast are moved from simple faith in Christ by a lack of understanding of God's Word. It is only a solid grasp of the Scriptures that brings real stability to our lives. Paul once observed that God has provided the church with apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers for the "perfecting of the saints" (Ephesians 4:11,12). A mark of this perfection is a unity of faith so stable that we will be "no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they he in wait to deceive" (Ephesians 4:14). How important it is for us to be founded on the Word, especially in our deception-ridden times! From the materialistic excesses of the prosperity movement ("Of course God wants all His children to drive Mercedes. You only drive a Toyota? How unspiritual can you be?") to "new" revelations about the only proper way to be baptized, strange twists of doctrine are the rule nowadays, not the exception. When Paul exhorts his friends in Galatians 5:1 to "stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage," his message is as relevant for us today as when he first wrote his letter. Often times the church itself will be the first to impose a legalistic standard of righteousness upon us. These rules and regulations are usually well-received because there is a certain security to the well-defined limitations a law provides. The cults offer people an overwhelming degree of personal direction and the "security" that comes from blind obedience to authority. But those who give themselves to such strictly regimented lifestyles do so at the cost of personal freedom. They fail to realize that along with the sense of security these groups provide comes an intense level of condemnation if one breaks from the standards. Many who were enslaved in such systems tell us they believed that leaving the group was tantamount to leaving God. If a convert begins to question the group or wants to go somewhere else, they are told they are in danger of hell. These kind of pressure tactics and outrageous claims to an exclusive lock on the truth are the earmarks of bondage-based groups. On the other hand, a church that encourages people to find a place where they will be able to grow in their walk with the Lord shows a sign of spiritual health. At Calvary Chapel, we often suggest that people look around and find a place that can minister most effectively to them. Some who come to our fellowship would like to see more emotionalism or

sensationalism in our services. We encourage these people to exercise their freedom by finding a place more in keeping with their desires. We are not interested in seeing anyone bound to our church. It is vital for us to embrace this truth: Putting our faith in any work cuts us off from the grace of God. Paul's use of the phrase "yoke of bondage" is probably a reference to the words of Simon Peter at the first Jerusalem Council. In Acts 15, Peter recounted God's call for him to minister to the Gentiles at the house of Cornelius. He suggested that the council not place upon non-Jews a yoke of bondage "which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear" (verse 10). Paul cites Peter's words to emphasize that the message of freedom in grace was not something he developed on his own. This liberty in Christ was the solid position of the church.

Rituals Do Not Save;... A key aspect of the teaching rejected at the Jerusalem Council was the insistence that Gentiles go through the ritual of circumcision in order to be saved. The council agreed with Paul that works cannot possibly make anyone righteous. Paul later stated that putting faith in a ritual runs counter to the gospel. He wrote, "Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing" (Galatians 5:2). This permits us to safely say that putting our faith in any work cuts us off from the grace of God. It is vital for us to embrace this truth. Not many teachers go around anymore advocating circumcision for salvation, but how many times have we heard very sincere people insist that we must go through the ritual of baptism in order to be saved? Some take this principle to all kinds of strange extremes. There are sects who teach that not only must we be baptized to be saved, but we also must be baptized "correctly." Some insist we must be baptized in the name of Jesus only, Others maintain it must be done by an ordained minister of their particular denomination. Some get so obsessed with technicalities that they have split churches over sprinkling or immersion, or even whether people should be baptized forward or backward! The root of all this division is an improper trust in a particular good work to achieve right standing with God. The clear teaching of Scripture is that if we trust in any good work for salvation, then Christ is of no value to us. We can't ride both sides of the fence and trust Christ and our good works. If we trust in baptism as the basis of our salvation, we are putting our faith in works. We are building our spiritual house on a sandy foundation that will be incapable of sustaining us. A few years ago, a young man came to me and told me he was no longer a Christian, but had joined the Mormon church. When I asked in what he was trusting as his hope for eternal life, he replied his hope was based on his faith in Jesus Christ and continued membership in the Mormon church. I frankly told him his decision was tragic. The moment he put his trust in anything other than the finished work of Jesus Christ alone, he had gone too far. All we need to stand righteously before God is faith in Christ. If we insist on trusting in Jesus and circumcision (or baptism or tithing or continued membership in a church), then Christ will be of no value to us whatsoever.

It's All or Nothing;.... Those who depend on their works for righteousness can't adopt a pick-and-choose approach. If we accept one good work as necessary for salvation, we become debtors to the whole law; we must keep the law in its entirety. As Paul pointed out in Galatians 3:10, "For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." James amplified this truth when he stated, "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all" (James 2:10). If we look to the law for righteousness, not only will Christ avail us nothing, but we also will have to keep every command to utter perfection. Our relationship with God is predicated on legalism or grace. Paul pulled no punches in his rejection of the false teaching of the Judaizers. He wrote, "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace" (Galatians 5:4). Those who bring their holier-than-thou sounding package to Christianity have rejected grace. It is helpful to remember that no one will be in heaven because of his good works. We will not have to listen to Abraham or David or Paul talk about all the wonderful things they did to achieve a righteous standing before God. These men simply believed God, and their faith was accounted for righteousness. None of us will stand in heaven comparing good works with one another because there will be only one whose works will be honored before the throne of God - our Lord, Jesus Christ. Jesus and Jesus alone will receive the glory for our salvation. If it were not for Him, none of us would get there. As Paul put it, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of Jesus Christ" (Galatians 6:14). No matter how many good deeds we've done for Him, no matter how many people we lead to Him or churches we establish for Him, our only glory is in Jesus Christ, who died for us. Our righteousness is not a question of good works, human efforts, keeping certain rituals or dietary laws. Our righteousness both at this moment and for all eternity is a result of our simple faith in God's Son, Jesus. Righteousness by faith removes all the distinctions between those who belong to Christ. I am no better than you, or you than me. We are all sinners, saved only by God's glorious grace. There is no other way to right standing before God. There is only one kind of righteousness that God will accept: the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ. This is no small side issue for us as believers. We must stand fast in the liberty wherein Christ has made us free. We must not allow condemning rules to come in and dominate our lives until we feel that, unless we are praying seven hours a day or reading 25 chapters of Scripture in our devotions, we are not really righteous. Our righteousness is not predicated upon how much we read, pray, fast, or give. Our righteousness is based upon simple trust in Jesus to wash us and cleanse us of our sins and to make us pure in the eyes of the Father. The work of our salvation has been done. There is nothing we can do to improve it. Our good works result from God's acceptance and love; we don't do works to earn His love. Walking according to Christ's commands doesn't make us more righteous - just happier and more satisfied. What better way to live than giving my existence to the one who loves me so much in the here and now and who has promised to take care of me forever? To be led and guided by God is the most fulfilling experience in the world.

Two Choices Only;.... All of us are either trying to work and be good enough to please God, or we are believing and trusting God to do for us what we can't do for ourselves. At each moment of our lives we find ourselves on one road or the other. If we are still trying to please God through being good enough, defeat and frustration will be our lot. If we have trusted in God's grace to transform us and form Christ within us, we will enjoy life and peace. I learned the timeless lesson that laws and rule-keeping can never change our hearts. I recall one incident when our family misguidedly tried to make a concerted effort at bringing a more Christ like atmosphere to our home. As our children were growing up there came a time when sibling rivalry seemed to be at an all-time high. Somehow our children had gotten into the habit of calling each other names. We found that addressing each other as "dummy," "stupid," or "idiot" had a way of creating friction. So we tried to bring some discipline to the situation and set up some rules. Now, in a two-story house, one of the most distasteful tasks is vacuuming the stairs. So in order to improve the tenor of our home life, we decided to keep records of family members who insulted each other. The one with the most violations had to vacuum the stairs. All this seemed very reasonable at the time, but to this day, I have the sneaky feeling that I was being set up. One day our two boys started to get into some mischief. When I came into the room they were in the middle of destroying. The first words out of my mouth were, "What stupid idiot left this mess?"

No doubt you can figure out who ended up vacuuming the stairs. One good thing came out of it, however. I learned again the timeless lesson that laws and rule-keeping can never change our hearts. Our motives were good. We all struggled in this family endeavor at righteousness - yet we all fell miserably short. It seems that no matter how hard we try to be holy, we have to face the fact that our righteousness is as filthy rags in the sight of the Lord. God has provided a different hope of righteousness for us - a standing and a relationship with Himself that we must receive as a gift. Righteousness is imparted to us by believing in Jesus Christ and knowing that we can't live up to a perfect standard. This is the crucial choice set before us. We can try to clean up our old, tattered, dirty rags and try to look presentable in heaven; or we can choose to be robed in the complete righteousness of Christ by faith. My vacuum cleaner reminds me that my only hope is to choose grace.

Off Course and Out of sight;....It never ceases to amaze me how easy it is to get off course in the Christian life. Even a seemingly minor flaw in a relatively small area of faith or practice can get us completely off center in almost every facet of our Christian life. Therefore, making every effort to maintain doctrinal purity is growing more important every day. Recently I had the opportunity to discuss spiritual issues with a fellow who believed the church would go through the Great Tribulation. He wondered why I would take such a strong stand on what he considered an unimportant facet of eschatology. I responded by asking, "If the church is going to go through the Great Tribulation, who are the 144,000 mentioned in the book of Revelation?" He replied that these people were part of the church because the church is spiritual Israel. I then asked him if he believed that all of God's promises to national Israel were somehow spiritually fulfilled in the church. He agreed that they were. "How interesting," I said, "that such an 'unimportant' area of eschatology has completely affected your doctrine of the church as well." To put it in Paul's terms, "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump" (Galatians 5:9). Let's put it another way. Imagine you are traveling by plane from Los Angeles to Hawaii. Before takeoff, the pilot comes on the loudspeaker and says, "Well folks, we're having a slight problem with our navigational system, but don't worry about it. We'll not be more than two degrees off course." Two degrees wouldn't be much just out of Los Angeles, but by the time we were 3,000 miles over the Pacific, we would be hopelessly lost. The Big Island would be nowhere in sight. Clearly, the best approach is to avoid being even a slight degree off course. In matters of doctrine, it is imperative that we search the Scriptures, prove all things, and avoid being taken in by the persuasive arguments of men. That is how we stand in grace.

Costly Vigilance;....Don't be deceived - this vigilance costs something. Controversy and persecution have surrounded the preaching of the gospel from the beginning. As Paul remarked in Galatians 5:11, 'And I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? Then is the offense of the cross ceased.' If Paul were preaching that a right standing with God could be gained by a series of good works, there would be no opposition to Christianity. But the cross of Christ has always been an offense. The cross shows us there is only one way to be righteous before God. The true message of salvation in Christ alone offends people because it is so narrow and exclusive. The cross declares to the world that there is only one hope for eternal life, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Paul is in essence saying, "If I want to be liberal and say, 'Circumcision is fine if it works for you,' then no one would persecute me. But I am being persecuted because I have cared enough to stand for the truth." Paul was never one to mince words. We can see his emotional commitment to the truth in his verbal broadside against those consumed with the issue of circumcision. "I would they were even cut off which trouble you," he wrote in Galatians 5:12. The term rendered "cut off" in the King James Version literally means "to emasculate" or "castrate." Paul meant, "If these false teachers believe a little mutilation of the flesh makes us righteous, then why don't they go all the way and start with themselves while they're at it!" A modern parallel to Paul's statement might be, "I wish those who tell you righteousness comes through baptism would go all the way and drown themselves!" Paul vented his feelings toward those who would dare to pervert the glorious gospel of grace. Think of how heartsick these developments must have made the apostle. Here was a fellowship where the Spirit was working, where people were in love with God and each other. There was unity and excitement in the Lord until these false teachers arrived on the scene. With the introduction of their own version of the gospel, they created division and soon factions began to develop. The beautiful love and fellowship this body had known soon became but a distant memory. No wonder Paul's denunciation of their teaching was so direct!

Thanks, Paul!....We who have come to the glorious saving grace of Jesus Christ owe Paul a great measure of thanks. If it were not for him, many in the church might easily have become part of just another Jewish sect. But it was Paul who stood firm and established new believers in the grace of Jesus Christ. His stand cost him something. He was persecuted and slandered and viciously opposed for most of his ministry. But it was worth it. At the end of his life he could write these stirring words, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (II Timothy 4:7,8).

May God give us the grace to stand for the truth and the wisdom to share it in love. May He grant that we stand fast in Jesus Christ and in the knowledge of the truth. May we realize the incredible depth of blessing and freedom that God has so richly granted to us. And may we experience these blessings daily as we walk in God's beautiful love, standing fast in His glorious grace.

("Why Grace Changes Everything"; Chuck Smith; Chapter 12: "All Or Nothing")