

JACOB'S LETTER

 A Zephon Ministry

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◆ REFORMING REFORMATION THEOLOGY ◆



FROM THE EDITOR

With a sincere heart and an uncompromising stance toward the Gospel of Jesus Christ may I humbly ask that you look past the surface of the content in this particular newsletter and strive to be a Berean — find out from God's Word if the words following are really so. By no means is it our intent to bring to conclusion an issue which has been exhaustingly debated for centuries by the best and brightest saints this world has had the opportunity to read and hear. Even so, the *salvational* teaching today is so out of whack that, I'm sure, the Reformers themselves would be utterly befuddled at what has come of so-called Christian Orthodoxy today.

It was cold and damp on the eve of All Saints' Day. After an exhausting walk, a certain man reached for a tack and mallet and with the utmost determination affixed a list of theses - {95 to be exact} - to a beautiful wooden door which belonged to a quaint little castle church in Wittenberg, Germany. The year was 1517 and the man, a Roman Catholic monk, was Martin Luther. Thus technically began the *Protestant Reformation*, and with it the much heralded Latin exclamation: *Sola fide, sola gratis, sola Scriptura!* That is - by **faith** alone, through **grace** alone, by the **Scriptures** alone!

What a victory! The saints of God had taken the *beast* by the horns, as it were, and proclaimed with shouts of gladness the death of Romish Church domination. The truth was to be heard from Germany

to Switzerland, from England to the America's - *the pope and his church* are wrong! Justification is by faith alone!

Yet, almost 500 years later what has happened? Today modern Evangelicalism has changed the wording a bit to read, **salvation** is by faith alone! We have cheapened God's grace to a point where no longer are good works required for eternal salvation - but only faith! German theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, put it this way,

Cheap grace is the deadly enemy of our church. We are fighting today for costly grace. Cheap grace means grace sold on the market like the cheapjack's wares.

Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.¹

But! . . . But, we're not under the Law! We're under grace now. Jesus paid it all. Christians today are living in the dispensation of grace. We're saved by faith alone! Salvation is a gift from God . . . *we can't earn it!*

How many of us have grown up hearing this exclusive doctrine? "When we tell people today that *righteous behavior is an essential aspect of the Christian redemption, that apart from good works there is no salvation, we are accused of preaching 'works'.*"² The pundits start screaming LEGALISM! Out come the Bibles and soon Scriptures are flowing from Romans like, **Therefore we conclude that a man is justifi-**

fied by faith without the deeds of the law, (Ro. 3:28), "For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace, (6:14); But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the Law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law, (9:31-32). Then they move to Galatians, "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified, (2:16). Then Ephesians, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast, (2:8). And the more learned scholars will then brave to venture into James' epistle and explain the seeming contradictions the brother of our LORD Jesus writes in contrast to the words of Paul. But, before we move into the book of James, let's back up.

The Reformers stated that justification is *by faith alone*. Were they correct? Was their statement biblically sound? Most Christians today assume they are saved because they believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that he died for their sins and as a result of their confession of *faith* he has given them eternal life. They cannot do *anything* to earn their salvation. Let's stop right here. CONTINUED NEXT PAGE

THE BIG ~ 'IF'
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Most of the confusion begins when we substitute the word **salvation** for the word **justification**. *"What the Christian salvation is, is in very great need of redefinition. Salvation is defined today as a blanket forgiveness of our sins, an unconditional amnesty, the purpose of which is to grant us escape from Hell and entrance into the spiritual Paradise when we die. To this has been added a flight to Heaven just before the great tribulation commences. Once in Heaven we will live in mansions and possess acres of diamonds. What happens after that seems to be uncertain. This salvation is for Gentiles. The inheritance of the Jews is a kingdom on the earth.*

*The above is mythology."*³

This is what happens when people follow systems of theology rather than the Word of God. Circa 1860, a man within the Plymouth Brethren by the name of John Nelson Darby perpetuated the newly developed doctrine of dispensationalism. The gist of it being that since the resurrection of Christ Christians have been in the dispensation of *Divine Grace*. In other words, we cannot keep the Law and therefore we need only Christ and are saved by grace entirely and not by works. Okay. In a matter of form this is very true. But let's turn back to justification. What is it? And when does it occur?

The sinner is justified when he confesses his sin and accepts God's grace by faith knowing he has not kept God's perfect Law and therefore, as a sinner, he must accept God's righteousness through the second Person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ, moreover, he believes what God said and therefore turns to Christ for his salvation. Thus, Jesus Christ imputes to that sinner His righteousness and clears his sins. The sinner is now a born-again saint destined for the kingdom of heaven. He stands no longer condemned. He is now redeemed, in a specific sense,

by the precious blood of the Lamb! And as a free gift, God gives to him eternal life. He is now ready to fulfill the Law of God written not on tables of stone but on his heart — *". . . precept upon precept; line upon line, . . . here a little, and there a little."*

Using the words of Martin Luther himself, *"doing the works of the law and fulfilling the law are two very different things. The work of the law is everything that one does, or can do toward keeping the law of his own free will or by his own powers. But since under all these works and along with them there remains in the heart dislike for the law and the compulsion to keep it, these works are all wasted and have no value. That is what St. Paul means in [Romans] chapter 3, when he says, "By the works of the law no man becomes righteous before God."* Hence you see that the wranglers and sophists are deceivers, when they teach men to prepare themselves for grace by means of works. *How can a man prepare himself for good by means of works, if he does no good works without displeasure and unwillingness of heart? How shall a work please God, if it proceeds from a reluctant and resisting heart?*

*To fulfill the law, however, is to do its works with pleasure and love, and to live a godly and good life of one's own accord, without the compulsion of the law. This pleasure and love for the law is put into the heart by the Holy Ghost, as he says in chapter 5 [of Romans]. But the Holy Ghost is not given except in, with, and by faith in Jesus Christ, as he says in the introduction; and faith does not come, save only through God's Word or Gospel, which preaches Christ."*⁴

Justification, then, is an act done supernaturally by God and nothing man can do or ever think to do can ever justify him in the sight of a Holy and Just God. Therefore, the sinner, now a saint, has accepted

the "free-gift" of eternal life and the cleansing from and forgiveness of all sins committed in the flesh prior to the point of being water baptized. Where some Christians seem to waver on biblical truth is when they equate the salvation **process** to just one single act . . . that being justification. In other words, *once saved - always saved*. Is this biblical? Or can men indeed lose their inheritance?

Most churches today are not spiritually discerning and are simply playing make-believe with God. They have fashioned to themselves a Jesus and a *salvation*, but is he the Christ of the Holy Scriptures and is the salvation this Jesus offers Scriptural? Their Jesus epitomizes the proverbial cliché — *easy believeism*. A cure-all for sin is he. 'Just accept our Jesus', they say, and nothing more needs doing. You can now relax. In truth however, it seems they are *all just mice building nests and playing machismo games in a great cathedral*. And God is not pleased how they play fast and reckless with his gift of life. These proud and, often times, self-righteous Christians are *"lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; [they have] a form of godliness, but deny the power thereof,"* (ref. II Timothy 3:4-5).

"It may be true that the common denominator of the deceptions of the last days is a misunderstanding of the grace of God under the New Covenant. The current perversion of Paul's teaching of grace may prove to be the deadliest, the most destructive, of all the heresies that have afflicted the churches of [Jesus Christ].

The present teaching states that since we are complete in [Christ], our sin is not counted as sin. It says we ought to try to do good, but if we are not successful in our attempt there is no critical problem. It claims that God does not hold us guilty of sin because

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search for yourself, for on the day of Judgment we will not be judged by what we have been taught by men, but rather by the Word of God. Again, I say SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES! On Judgment day you'll be glad that you did! ⁵

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[Christ's] righteousness covers us.

Carry this conclusion to it's logical end and what will you come up with? Probably - if we sin, oh well, God will forgive us. Will he?

"The relationship between the Law of Moses and the grace of God in Messiah Jesus is seldom, it appears, presented clearly. The Christian position is stated as, we are not under the Law but under grace; or, Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

These comments are scriptural, but they do not solve the problem of the Christian and sin. The result is that today there are literally millions of Christians who have little understanding of how God regards their behavior. There is utter confusion on this point, and the believers remain spiritual babies as a result.

Many Christians have not progressed beyond the stage of being born-again. ⁶

When we first receive [Jesus Christ] we are given His righteousness so that God will be pleased to receive us. This initial righteousness is termed "imputed righteousness" in that it is assigned to us apart from righteous behavior on our part.

Imputed righteousness is the foundation of the Christian redemption and is of the utmost importance. But imputed righteousness has been carried into the area reserved for righteous behavior, and this is where the problem lies. The bulk of the passages in the books of the New Testament indicate the need for righteous behavior, not imputed

righteousness.

The kingdom of God is not in imputed righteousness. Imputed righteousness is given to us so we may begin the process of becoming a new righteous creation. The kingdom of God is not imputed righteousness, it is the doing of God's will in the earth as it is in Heaven.

There are two kinds of righteousness under the New Covenant - imputed righteousness and actual righteousness of behavior. **The believer will not understand the Christian redemption until he keeps clearly in his mind the difference between the two kinds of righteousness.**

The role of imputed righteousness is to serve as an atonement, a continual covering while we are being changed from sin and self-seeking to righteousness and holiness of behavior.

Imputed righteousness includes forgiveness. It is an atonement.

The imputed righteousness that is part of the grace of the new covenant has little to do with our behavior. It is a legal position that forgives our previous sins. Because the world cannot see our legal position before the Lord, imputed righteousness cannot possibly serve as the Christian witness, the moral light to guide the nations of the earth.

There is no actual counterpart in the Law of Moses to the imputed righteousness of the new covenant. God's wrath was appeased by the offering of animals. But the atoning blood of God's Messiah [commissions] God to see us a perfectly righteous at all times - a state than never could be produced by the blood of animals.

One great difference between the righteousness of the Law of Moses and the righteousness of the new covenant is that under the new covenant we **begin** our walk with God being clothed with the very righteousness of [Jesus Christ].

Imputed righteousness has

been preached accurately and thoroughly by the Christian ministry. A good job has been done. The tremendous problem of 20th century evangelical thinking is that there is little understanding of the **actual** righteousness of the Kingdom of God - the new righteous creation made possible by the initial, foundational gift of imputed righteousness. ⁷

Martin Luther, talking about the apostle Paul's teaching in Romans, states that Paul "begins to teach the right way by which men must be justified and saved, and says they are all sinners and without praise from God, but they must be justified, without merit, through faith in Christ, who has earned this for us by His blood, and has been made for us a mercysat by God, Who forgives us all former sins, proving thereby that we were aided only by His righteousness, which He gives in faith, which is revealed in this time through the Gospel and "testified before by the law and the prophets."

The Law was given, in order that we might seek after grace. Grace was given, in order that we might fulfill the Law. It was not the fault of the Law that it was not fulfilled, but the fault was man's carnal mind. This guilt the Law must make manifest, in order that we may be healed by divine grace.

St. Augustine - A.D. 354-430

Many Christians today, rightfully so - believe Christ died for all of a man's sins — past, present, and future. But man's forgiveness by God of the sins committed in the flesh once he's been justified ARE **CONDITIONAL!** Conditional upon his confessing and repenting of them. In so doing these sins also come under the blood of our LORD Jesus Christ.

We cannot continue to sin and think God simply sees Christ's

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righteousness alone. And we cannot "dismiss the relationship between Moses and [Jesus Christ] by saying we are not under the Law but under grace. [The apostle] "Paul's argument against the Law of Moses [in Romans]. . . has been grievously misunderstood. This misunderstanding has wrecked the churches of our day.

[His argument] "has been interpreted by Gentiles as an argument against righteous and holy behavior. It is as though we are saved apart from righteous and holy behavior, when in fact righteous and holy behavior **are** salvation and proof of the Kingdom of God in our life.

One doctrinal position is that by accepting [Jesus Christ], the Law of Moses has no more authority over us. Our sins are forgiven, and when we sin God does not see our sin but only the righteousness of [Christ].

The other position is that the Law has condemned us to death because of our sin. Therefore, we have identified ourselves through water baptism with the crucified Messiah. By faith we have risen together with Him to the right hand of God. Messiah is now our life, and when we appear we will appear with Him in glory, ready to restore Paradise to the earth.

The one position considers that our sins are covered no matter how we behave; we ought to try to do good because we love Jesus, but our eligibility for eternal life in heaven is not based on our behavior but on the grace and mercy of God. We are not under the Law but under amnesty. [Christ] is the end of the Law, the abolishing of the Law, and freely assigns righteousness to those who have faith in Him.

The other position views salvation as the means of deliverance from sin and of bringing forth a new righteous creation. When we sin we are to confess our sins, repent, and avail ourselves of the grace of God to enable us to overcome the sin.

Because we are not under the Law but under grace, we are legally free to enter complete union with the Lord Jesus. Our union with Messiah brings forth the fruit of righteousness each day. The new creation is being revealed in our personality. We are growing continually in the ability to distinguish between good and evil, being able to select the good and resist the evil. [Christ] is the aim and purpose of the Law and the Law has brought us to Him.

The two positions are not the same. One is the true Gospel of salvation. The other is another gospel. Make no mistake - they are not the same! One of them is accurate and the other is a grievous error."⁸

Now we are not pretending to cover all the aspects of Justification by faith alone in this article, to assume such would be inconceivable - not to mention foolish. None the less, we have intended to adequately condense this particular issue so that some may actually understand, including ourselves, a knowable and practical individual application. Hence, let us again reiterate that **Justification is by faith alone!** One cannot keep the Law of Moses and expect to be justified because righteousness can only come from God! Good works don't justify sinners - but faith in God will! Abraham was justified by faith. As the Scripture says, "**For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness,**" (Romans 4:2-3). As a quick aside, when the Protestant Reformers spoke of "works" they did not speak of what most consider today as works - for example, moral and righteous acts. The reformers were, often times, specifically addressing the 'works' of the 7 Sacraments of Roman Church dogma. Thus, Reformation theology taught that one could not come to Christ by upholding the 'works' of the Catholic

church and expect to be justified in the sight of God unto salvation. The Protestant Reformers truthfully declared that only through faith in the blood atonement of Jesus Christ alone will the sinner be justified by God. Whether it was the Mosaic Law, the Sacraments of the Church of Rome, or Hebrew and Gentile tradition, none could be kept to the point of meriting eternal life and the forgiveness of sin.

As Paul told the Galatian believers, "**I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ died in vain,**" (Galatians 2:20-21).

Is God's grace an alternative to good works or is it a means to fulfilling the works of the Law?

Does Christ **require** good works in exchange for salvation?

Well, the act of doing the good works we previously spoke of cannot justify a man in the sight of God. Because, as Luther states, "**They (the work-righteous) strive after good works and regard them as the foundation of their righteousness, the refuge of their conscience, and the solace of their soul, although Christ alone exists (as the foundation) before all good works. Has there ever been so foolish a builder who first tried to lay a foundation (when one already existed)? Does he not use the foundation which already is laid in the ground? Without our efforts, Christ, offers Himself to us as our Righteousness, our peace, and our rest for conscience, in order that we may always build upon this (foundation) our good works.**" Unfortunately, a lot of Christians dart off half-cocked and consider the finished work of Jesus

Christ on the cross all that is necessary for their eternal salvation. Yet, when one begins to run counter to this error and suggest that 'good works' **MUST** be built upon Christ's foundation in order to **ATTAIN** the crown of righteousness, and ultimately the salvation of his soul, he is accused of promulgating 'works-righteousness,' as well as preaching a '**second work of grace**,' etc., etc.

However, as St. Bernard of Clairvaux [1090-1153 A.D.] rightly says: "As soon as you do not desire to become better, then you have ceased to be good." And as Luther adds, "It does not help a tree to have green leaves and flowers if it does not bear fruit besides its flowers. For this reason - (for not bearing fruit) - many (nominal Christians) perish in their flowering."

But what about Ephesians 2:8-9? - "**For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man would boast.**"

CONTEXT! CONTEXT! CONTEXT! At this point let's clarify some things — a definition of terms, if you will. *Justification DOES NOT* substitute for eternal salvation. Nor does *grace* mean unconditional forgiveness of unrepentant sin. Grace, once heard defined, is - *God in Christ enabling people to do God's will.*⁹ Eternal salvation **IS** the end of the process of sanctification not the prerequisite to. That is, the salvation of our souls comes **AT THE END — NOT THE BEGINNING!** Many have this backward today. It is taught that at first we are saved. At the first we are **forgiven!** And yes, we are saved in the sense of *not being appointed unto the wrath of God.* However, let's look at the apostle Peter's teachings. Addressing the believers scattered throughout Asia minor Peter exhorted them saying, "**Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of**

gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise an honour an glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: RECEIVING THE END OF YOUR FAITH, EVEN THE SALVATION OF YOUR SOULS, [emphasis added], (I Peter 1:6-9). The writer of Hebrews calls us to "**hope unto the end,**" (ref. Heb. 6:11). Likewise, Jesus warns the disciples to prepare for persecution saying, "**. . . ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that ENDURETH TO THE END SHALL BE SAVED,**" [emphasis added] - (Matthew 10:22).

And hey, why not plan to do a study of the 2nd & 3rd chapters of *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*? It seems apparent that **ONLY** the overcomers will prevail, [be saved, i.e. allowed to partake of the Tree of Life].

Now it is not the scope of this article to address just *what kind* of salvation Jesus is referring to in Matthew and The Revelation, in particular - whether it be the saving {i.e. protection} of the body or the soul. The point is there is a salvation to occur when Jesus Christ is revealed at His Second Coming. Jesus reiterates this again in Matthew chapter 24 (vs. 13), "**But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.**"

Never has God stopped requiring righteousness in his people. Somehow the righteousness imputed to us from Christ at the beginning has become a scapegoat for immoral living, and if not this, then it most certainly has led to some believing that 'good works' after one's justification are important but yet not necessary to attain eternal life.

This is the prevailing attitude amongst professing believers today "**. . . we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags;** (Isaiah 64:6). They

take this verse and conclude from it the fallacy of salvation being a work of God entirely and nothing needs to be done further by man. Woe! Wait just a minute. The context in Isaiah clearly illustrates that this is speaking of being **justified** by our own 'good works' - viz., the keeping of the Law rather than believing by faith. The passage seems not to pertain to the 'born-again' believer but the unrepentant sinner seeking to gain a right standing with God by performing his own works. The apostle Paul contrasted the 'keeping of the Mosaic law in the Old covenant to grace in the New covenant—**NOT RIGHTEOUS BEHAVIOR! GRACE IS NOT AN ALTERNATIVE TO OR A REPLACEMENT FOR RIGHTEOUS BEHAVIOR.**

Plainly, we cannot come to God as a sinner and demand acceptance on the basis of our 'works' but only through faith in Jesus Christ and **HIS WORK!** As George Whitefield (1714-1779) said:

Good works have their proper place.

**They justify our faith,
though not our persons;
they follow it, and evidence our
justification in the sight of men.**

"In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; (Ephesians 1:7). "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them, (Eph. 2:10).

Much can be said on this issue, in fact, thousands of books written attest to this, even so, it is the intent of this essay to hopefully enlighten the reader to study further rather than simply take men at their word in lieu of taking God at **His Word!**

To conclude, let this writer say that one does not sit down to rest

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and relax in a race, *let alone a spiritual war*. Nor does one turn back and go in the opposite direction if a prize is being sought. The medal goes to the winner! The crown to the overcomer! The peace comes to the genuinely repentant! And the salvation of one's soul to the pure and holy --- the *upright of heart!* Ω

The Book of PSALMS

7:12; 32:11; 36:10; 64:10;
94:15; 97:10; 111:1

When faith is in the mouth rather than in the heart, when the solid knowledge of Sacred Scripture fails us, nevertheless by terrorization we drive men to believe what they do not believe, to love what they do not love, to know what they do not know. That which is forced cannot be sincere, and that which is not voluntary cannot please God.

Desiderius Erasmus
(1469-1536)

**Many Whom We Look To For
Guidance Will Reject True Light
When It Comes**

But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.

Matthew 23:13

... This many of the teachers in the churches are doing today. They propagate error by teaching for doctrine the commandments of men. In no way do their lives honor God or the Scriptures. Falsehoods which have been handed down from century to century are taught as the Word of God. If these are questioned, those

who advocate them do not say, "Let us search the Word of God, which is the test of all doctrine; let us compare scripture with scripture, for the Word of God is the treasure-house of all knowledge." Instead, they utterly refuse to make unprejudiced investigation.

Many of those to whom the people look for instruction are not leading their flocks to the pure water of life. If by reading the Word one is awakened to search for truth, if by seeking to know what the Scriptures teach, he shows that he would become a wise householder, he is charged with doing great mischief. **He sees the truth, not as the ministers have declared it, but as Christ has presented it in the Old and New Testaments, and as a faithful steward he tells those around him; for he would have them share with him the message of grace. But how is he treated by the religious teachers? -- Just as Christ was treated by the Jewish leaders. He is held up to ridicule. The ministers denounce him from the pulpit, declaring that he is causing division in the churches. Eternal interests are at stake, but those who ought to receive the light with rejoicing, fight against the Word of God as dangerous.** They do not say to those they think are misled: "Come, let us examine this subject together. If you have received light, give it to us; for we need every ray of light that is shining from the Word of God. Our souls will be imperiled if we entertain and teach error.

"There is to be in the churches a wonderful manifestation of the power of God, but it will not move upon those who have not humbled themselves before the Lord, and opened the door of the heart by confession and repentance. In the manifestation of that power which lighten the earth with the glory of God, **they will see only something which in their blindness they think dangerous, something which will arouse their fears, and they will embrace themselves to resist it.** Because the Lord does not work according to their ideas and expectations, they will oppose the work. "Why," they say, "should not we know the Spirit of God, when we have been in the work so many years? - - Because they did not respond to the warnings, the entreaties of the messages of God, but persistently said, "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing." Talent, long experience, will not make men . . . [beacons] of light, unless they place themselves under the bright beams of the Sun of Righteousness, and are called, and chosen, and prepared by the endowment of the Holy Spirit. When men who handle sacred things will humble themselves under the mighty hand of God, the Lord will lift them up. He will make them men of discernment -- men rich in the grace of his Spirit. Their strong, selfish traits of character, their