

**A Gracious God, in the Old Testament and the New:
Interviews With John McKenna**

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## Introduction

This is a transcript of five interviews conducted as part of the *You're Included* series, sponsored by Grace Communion International. We have more than 100 interviews available. You may watch them or download video or audio at [www.gci.org/YI](http://www.gci.org/YI). Donations in support of this ministry may be made at [www.gci.org/donate](http://www.gci.org/donate).

Grace Communion International is in broad agreement with the theology of the people we interview, but GCI does not endorse every detail of every interview. The opinions expressed are those of the interviewees. We thank them for their time and their willingness to participate.

Please understand that when people speak, thoughts are not always put into well-formed sentences, and sometimes thoughts are not completed. In the following transcripts, we have removed occasional words that did not seem to contribute any meaning to the sentence. In some cases we could not figure out what word was intended. We apologize for any transcription errors, and if you notice any, we welcome your assistance.

Our guest in the following interviews is John McKenna, who, at the time of the interview, was Vice-President and Professor of Old Testament at World Mission University, adjunct Professor of Biblical Studies at Azusa Pacific University, and doctrinal adviser for Grace Communion International. He now teaches two classes at Grace Communion Seminary. He studied under Thomas F. Torrance at the University of Edinburgh and received his Ph.D. from Fuller Theological Seminary. He is the author of:

*The Setting in Life for The Arbiter of John Philoponus, 6th Century Alexandrian Scientist* and

*The Great AMEN of the Great I-AM: God in Covenant With His People in His Creation.*

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No Separation Between God and Humanity

J. Michael Feazell: Dr. McKenna, years ago, at least 15 years ago as I think back, I came across a passage that had a profound effect on me, in Romans chapter 5, something you're quite familiar with, where Paul writes, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." A couple of verses further down, he says, "For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!"

The idea that God did what he did for us while we still his enemies was profound enough, but it made me realize that there is no such thing as a "them" and "us" in God's eyes, because God has done what he has done for his enemies, which includes everyone. I'd always read where Jesus told us, "Love your enemies, do good to those who persecute you" and so on, in the Beatitudes in Matthew 5, and yet the idea that we tend in America, at least what we grow up with regarding God, is that he's very unforgiving to his enemies and punishes them forever.

It seems a dichotomy that I could never reconcile: "love your enemies," and yet God doesn't seem to love his enemies until they change and become his friends, and yet this passage in Romans says, he loved them and did what he did while they're still his enemies.

John McKenna: I think what you were wrestling with was the logic of grace, the logic of God's great gift of peace for us, even while we're his enemies. That logic is not common sense. You cannot turn the logic of grace into what we consider sensible on a common basis. To wrestle through that kind of problem is to wrestle into a whole new kind of logic that we have to learn from listening to the Word of God and the way he has taken to make us his friends.

JMF: Loving your enemies isn't common logic, is it? Typically, the way you have to get along in the world is not by loving your enemies, but trying to outwit them, outsmart them, get them out of the way somehow. And yet the gospel seems to be telling us something quite different from that.

JM: It certainly is. We have talked in the past about the assumption that sinners are separated and alienated from God and they need to do something in order to become reconciled to God. I think you referred to it as a very common way of introducing people to the gospel of God in Christ, and we ask people to make decisions that the separation ...

JMF: You mean the idea that there is a giant gulf, there is no bridging that gulf, and so on,

and then we draw a picture of Christ being the bridge our faith ...

JM: And you have to decide to walk across that bridge, or something like that, if you're going to be reconciled to God.

The passage you read is dealing with something that God has done in reality with himself for our sakes, on our behalf and in our places. He has demonstrated his love for us even when we don't love him, even when we don't know who he is. He's always working with his love to get us to know him for who he truly is.

JMF: So there is something that God has done for us already before we ever even think about becoming believers, there is a reconciliation from his side that already has taken place.

JM: Get rid of this assumption that there is a separation between God and man. There is no separation. If there seems to be a separation between God and man, it belongs to the side of man, who perceives the separation because of his sin.

JMF: So the alienation is from our human standpoint, we sense ourselves, we see ourselves alienated from God – or we simply don't care. But from God's side, he's done something that ... well, what is it? Colossians chapter 1 speaks to that, where it shows what the actual relationship and standing of all things is to God from his side. Colossians 1:17-21:

“He is before all things [speaking of Christ] and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him, to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds...” he says, which is the opposite of what he just said, yes.

JM: I like the emphasis.

JMF: “Alienated... and enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you...” So our perception of what God thinks of us and what he's done for us and how he has set thing up changes when we come to faith, but it [reality] is no different from the way it has been from God's side in his love for us through Christ, Colossians seems to be saying.

JM: What has to change is your perception. What has to change is your mind about the relationship between God, the world, and man as Jesus Christ. People call him in Colossians “the cosmic Christ” – this is not just an individual particular man. This individual particular man is

the creator of all things, and as the creator, he has the authority and the power and the holy love to reconcile all things to himself without asking anybody about it, let alone nail you.

JMF: You just had a big reunion at Princeton University.

JM: I loved it, yeah. This idea of separation between the believing church and the unbelieving world came across to me in some kind of glaring proportions during my time. I had agreed to give a testimony in a church in the Sunday of the last of the four days which were part of the reunion at Princeton. I was asked by the church people to participate in much, much more. They have a whole organized effort to bring about revival and reconciliation for the university to Christ. Getting the university back to Christ like it was in the beginning, that kind of thing.

JMF: This is the core of Christian believers at Princeton.

JM: I kept refusing, resisting joining them, because I wanted to spend time with these university people that I knew, who are the unbelievers, and that's what I did and I had a wonderful time. The grace of God was with me. I saw some blessing of the grace of God, because I went to these people in the peace of God for them, that God wasn't separated from them, that God was there for them, that God was concerned for them. That's the way we spent for three days and three nights. When I got back to the church, it was very glaring to me the way that the separation between the church and the world – the believer and the unbeliever.

JMF: The sense that believers tend to have, that there's a "them" and "us."

JM: The believers are the "good guys" and the unbelievers are the "bad guys," and there is this war going on between the good guys and the bad guys. For me that's not the logic of grace, that we've mentioned. The logic of grace is that Christ sends, he sends his Son, he sends his Spirit to be with us even while we are his enemies. He does this for good reason, with a wonderful purpose of getting us to know him for who he truly is, and the Colossians passage that you read we have to face the fact that who he is, is the Creator of the world as the Son of the Father. The eternal God has not separated himself from his enemies, but he has come to us to be with us and to seek to convert us to who he truly is.

JMF: That plays itself out then, or can, if we embrace that truth from the Scriptures, it allows us to understand what we perceive as enemies of God now differently and interact with them a bit differently.

JM: The way it works for me is that I'm sitting there with a guy who's obviously the enemy of God more obviously than I am the enemy of God, but I don't pretend that I am such a friend

of God that there is no enemy of God in me. It's just that the enemy of God that I am is a lot different than enemy of God that he is. So here we are, two enemies together of God, see what can happen by the grace in his peace, in the reality that he has done this for us in his beloved Son and by his Spirit.

JMF: You've had reunions before, ten years ago or fifteen years ago. And you approached the same people differently.

JM: From the separation assumption. I assumed that now that I had believed in Christ, I was the "good guy" and they were the "bad guys" and I could approach them as the bad guys and tell them that they needed to become the good guys. I did that, and these people would see me coming and get as far away from me as they could. That kind of hurt me, because I really loved these people that I knew, and I didn't want to see them running from me, and yet the only gospel I knew to present to them was this, "you're separated from God, you're alienated from God because of your sin, and you need to do this or to do that in order to be reconciled to the God that I've believed in."

JMF: There is a sense in which there is an alienation, and yet as we just read in Colossians, it's from our own, it's from their perspective.

JM: From our own hostile minds against them.

JMF: Now, this time, you were able to show them a different John McKenna, as it were ...

JM: Yeah, a humanity ... They liked me and they liked when I showed up. Even as a believer, they liked a humanity that could be with them, is the best way I can put it. I associate my conversion to this "no separation in the beginning" with the vicarious humanity of Christ. That Christ has been working in me to make me more human than I was. That humanity is something they could feel. So ten years ago they're running from me. This time with them, they actually appointed me their prayer warrior. They know that I'm going to be praying for them for the next five years until we meet again. That's a delight for me to experience. I associate that with the logic of the grace of God for us. I don't know what's going to happen to these people because I pray for them, but I thank God that they have appointed me their prayer partner.

JMF: You had a speaking part in the reunion on the agenda.

JM: Yes. It can't be at the Princeton University and the Princeton Battlefield, and the history of Princeton, without talking about freedom. Nassau Hall of Princeton University is the birth of the freedom of our nation. So you're talking about the whole atmosphere of what

freedom means – what freedom means to the church, what freedom means to the university, and what freedom means to their relationship. That kind of days I spent in a freedom, that I could go to a church and say “thank you very much, I felt your prayers and I felt that your prayers were helping me spend my time in the way I spent my time with the university. I didn’t spend my time the way you wanted me to spend my time, but thank you for your prayers because they really did help me.”

I could say that to the church and then I could report about the meaning of freedom, not only in my own life, not only in the life of the church as I know it, but in the life of our nation. Why did George Washington cross the Delaware and win over against the most professional armies in all the world at that time? What kind of freedom allowed him to win? I could associate, relate that freedom to the freedom that is the Spirit of God – where the Spirit of God is, there is freedom.

The church loved the testimony. I know the Lord was blessing it because when you talk to a church congregation and they like what you’ve said, then they ask you questions like you know the answers to everything, so I got all those questions that I don’t know how to answer very quickly, because they liked what I had to say about freedom.

I ended that testimony with my wife’s Mickey’s wonderful story about Gen. McArthur and the Emperor Hirohito and the Imperial Hotel in Japan – when McArthur went to see the Emperor after the occupation, and the surrender and the occupation, the conversation finally got around to the Emperor saying to McArthur, that he would be willing to give his death for his part in the responsibility for the war and McArthur looked at the Emperor and said, “There is no need to do that, there is one who has already done that for you.”

There is a moment of the grace of God in action with the enemy of the United States, and General McArthur carrying the grace of God to our enemy. Those are moments in history that speak of what freedom means in the context of the grace and peace which we read in this text.

JMF: In his book *The Mediation of Christ*, Thomas Torrance ... you studied under Thomas Torrance at Fuller Theological Seminary.

JM: Yes, I did. He became not only a mentor but a good friend.

JMF: He says on page 94, “Jesus Christ died for you precisely because you are sinful and utterly unworthy of him and has thereby already made you his own before and apart from your ever believing in him. He has bound you to himself by his love in a way that he will never let

you go, for even if you refuse him and damn yourself in hell, his love will never cease.”

He says that in the context of presenting the gospel from a Scriptural standpoint that recognizes who God is and what God has done – as opposed to one of the prevailing approaches, which is based on the idea of separation, as you mentioned earlier. He wants to say that this is more effective because it presents God as he really is. What is at the root of the idea of separation? Where does it come from, why did it become so common among us as Christians?

JM: Sinners like to perceive of themselves first as alone, and then in some kind of an aggravated relationship with somebody else, once they get over their aggravated relationship with themselves. It’s a perception that belongs to a sinful view of God, the world and mankind. The other way of looking at things has to do with being taken up through Christ and given access to the Father who is the Father, Son, and Spirit of eternity.

The most difficult part of understanding the gospel for me was to understand that when he lived and died and lives again for me, he takes me up to know him for who he is in his own eternity – Father and Son, and the Spirit. Knowing God in this way is to know yourself as a child of God. And to know yourself as a child of God is... there’s no separation between you and God, anymore that there is a separation between you [Mike] as a father and Chris. When is Chris no longer your son? It’s not going to happen, is it? – because of who you are. You’re his father and that’s it.

To be adopted up into God in that way is hard to believe. He has to work on us to get us to believe that we really are his children and we really do belong to him, and he has gone way out of his way. Tom likes to say, “If you really understand the gospel you have to understand that God loved you more than he loved himself.” He was willing, as the Son, to come and die and live for us. That’s not the logic of common sense. That’s not the logic of the kind of love that we define. This is a love that is strange and alien to us, and we have to learn it as his children.

JMF: The basis of this relationship we have with God, with the Father, is because Christ, in Christ we’ve been made one with Christ and as one with him, we share in his actual relationship with the Father.

JMF: I like to put it, because of the problems we have with... he gives us, by his Spirit, the freedom to choose God, the freedom to obey God, our wonderful freedom that is not like any other kind of freedom. When a man or a woman knows that they have been made free to choose God, to obey God, there is nothing in this world that can stop them from their destiny with God.

That is by the grace that moves the world. If you want a revival in the world, then be moved by the freedom of grace and the freedom of God to speak his word with us.

JMF: Usually we see ourselves as in a great struggle to keep God on our side – to keep God liking us or loving us by trying to behave better, as though we are carrying the burden of our relationship with God on our shoulders – as though it depends on how well we keep up our end as to whether God will stay benevolently disposed toward us, let's say. In effect, it's not only how we see and feel about ourselves in relationship to God, but also how we see others and train others. And again you experienced some of that with people you were re-acquainted with at Princeton.

JM: I like to turn that right on its head again, turn it up-side-down. God will not be who he truly is, without us. There is no God who will be without us. There is only the God who wills to be with us with himself. If you have an idea of God, that's not bad – your idea of God is not the God in the Bible. It needs to spend another year of reading the Bible or something, however that goes. The God of the Bible struggles.... you think with his people. We think *we* struggle. The God of the Bible struggles with his people, among the nations of the world and his Creation, to make himself known to people who prefer not to, thank you. It's his struggle, it's not ours.

JMF: What you said reminds me of the all-night struggle between Jacob and the Angel of the Lord, or the Lord, as the story presents it. It's not just a matter that Jacob was just trying, from his side, to get a blessing from this stranger. But this stranger, who is the Lord in the story, stays with Jacob in this struggle, and of course wins (and could have won at the very beginning, because he simply touches Jacob in a way that disables him).

JM: He is very merciful.

JMF: So he actually lets this continue on, and the end result is that Jacob finds out who it is that he is struggling with.

JM: He makes an altar, names the place, where he says the face of God.

JMF: You've written how this portends or is a... I could call it a metaphor, even though it's an actual story, but of the struggle that I just alluded to, of God and his people, for God's own purpose.

JM: That same kind of struggle we read throughout the Bible, Old and New Testaments – and the struggle is going on beyond the canon of the biblical world, it goes on in the church of the world today.

JMF: But it goes on in our individual lives as well, doesn't it?

JM: If we are in the world, it does. I don't know where you are, but that's where I am. That is, we're nowhere else except in the world.

JMF: We're often afraid to admit to that. We go to church, there's usually a sense of trying to put on a façade that we're doing fine, and that we're godly, wonderful people, and we put on the airs of that to each other, and yet, honestly speaking, each of us has our own personal individual struggle...

JM: I keep telling my classes, if they knew me the way I know me, they would not pay one dime to hear me teach. We don't like to know ourselves in the depths of our evil, the way God loves to know us. The way God is willing to go there in the depths of our evil and take us up and heal us and convert us to a "yes" that resonates with his "yes" for us.

JMF: Let's hold that thought, and maybe we can come back to that next time we get together.

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## God Gives Us Freedom

**J. Michael Feazell:** Dr. John McKenna, you just came from a very interesting reunion at Princeton University.

**John McKenna:** I sure had a wonderful experience for the 50<sup>th</sup> reunion of the Class of 1957 for Princeton University. It wasn't my first trip back to Princeton. My first trip back was in 1982, for the 25<sup>th</sup> reunion of this class, at which time I was invited to give a testimony at the Nassau Christian Center, which is a local congregation there at Princeton University.

**JMF:** They knew that your career was in Christian ministry at that time and...

**JM:** Yes. They invited me to come and give my testimony, and they wanted to hear how I got from a graduate of Princeton University in 1957 to Haight-Ashbury in 1972 and how I had been delivered from alcohol and drugs and so forth and had become a Christian. And how I had, from that time, one of the most important – I got married – and two, been able to get back into the academic life and at Fuller Theological Seminary receive a Master of Divinity degree and a PhD degree in theology.

**JMF:** That was 25 years ago, and they invited you to speak.

**JM:** Yes, and that was my first effort to relate back to my classmates. In those years I was, with the church, into the separation between the believer and the unbeliever. My friends at the university were mostly unbelievers, and I was with the good guys now, and they were the bad guys. The bad guys, when they would see the good guys coming, would scatter and try to avoid them as much as possible, because they don't want to become what the good guys... They wanted to be the bad guys, and the "bad guys" in a very real world. I wasn't very effective in terms of witnessing to that reunion. But I was well-accepted by the church, and the church people.

That bothered me because I loved my classmates, especially my roommates, and I wanted to get next to them, the way I've once been next to them, however, being a Christian didn't allow me to do that, I thought.

And then again, it was 2002, I went for the 45<sup>th</sup> reunion, and this time I was able to give testimony at the same Nassau Christian Center about the glorious freedom we have, and I was working my way through the freedom that we need to talk about, that is, the freedom where the Spirit of God is – could not be neither an abstract idea about freedom nor could it be some kind

of atheistic subjectivity about freedom. It couldn't be subjective autonomy. It couldn't be an independence that was absolutely free in the sense that independence has autonomy understands its....

I was beginning to wrestle with what is the real freedom that we have as believers in Jesus Christ. This time around, this year, the fifth year after that reunion, I have a whole new paradigm, a whole new way of understanding who I am in the gospel of God in Christ. I have come to an understanding that there was no separation between God and people – whether people were believers or unbelievers, God had done what he had done in Christ for all of us and I could, by his grace, take my humanity both to the believer and to the unbeliever in the same way.

**JMF:** What you are saying reminds me, right off the bat, of two passages. One in Romans 5: “While we were still enemies, God moved on our behalf.” And the Colossians passage, that

**JM:** “He has reconciled in all things...”

**JMF:** Yeah, all things. That turns our common view on its head of how we can look at other people who are not believers. I love this passage, so every opportunity to read, I have to take: “For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him (speaking of Christ) and through him, to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.”

Combined with the Romans passage about while you were enemies God does this for us, while we're still enemies, then how should we look at who we want to perceive as God's enemies, is very different ... like you were describing the very first time you went out there to see these people, now you can look at them very differently.

**JM:** I don't really believe that anyway, that they need to be told they're separated or alienated from God. They know that they are. Some people like to know that they are independent of God. I don't think God wants to be with them, encroaching upon their freedom at all. That's not the way he has chosen to be with us. He has chosen to be with us in his freedom in Christ for us, on our behalf. Christ's atoning for us, Christ working for us, Christ working upon us, and in us, to get us to know him for who he truly is, as the Son of the Father of eternity.

**JMF:** That very next verse in Colossians says, “For once you were alienated in your minds.”

**JM:** “In your minds ...” Yeah, that's what we need to talk about. The fact that the fallen mind is hostile and in enmity with God, and will perceive their humanity as separated from God.

**JMF:** But from God's side it's a very different picture. So when you went back recently to

the 50<sup>th</sup> ...

**JM:** Once you learn that, you have a different humanity utterly, in relationship with so-called “unbelievers” and believers. It’s no longer the good guys against the bad guys. It’s all people – some believing better than others, some not believing better than others. By his grace and in his Spirit, you can relate your humanity to them. I think that was the big difference, and I had a wonderful time especially with my five roommates, who were very happy that I was the kind of Christian I was.

One of my roommates is a Freudian psychiatrist. He was always so worried. I’ve met him at the 25<sup>th</sup>, and he was so worried that I would, as a Christian, become something he wouldn’t like. Well, he liked me. At the 50<sup>th</sup> he went way out of his way to tell me how happy he was that I hadn’t become the kind of Christian he thought he was going to meet. He didn’t meet the Christian that he thought he met in the 25<sup>th</sup> reunion. That difference has to do with this difference in the assumption that we are separated from God and those who have chosen to believe, they have become the good guys, and those who have not chosen yet to believe are the bad guys. There was the good guys against the bad guys.

I was delighted with the fact that he could say to me, “I really do like you.” That’s a long way from having a “run away” from you 25 years ago – because you’re going to talk about Christ with me.

**JMF:** So your impact on him in terms of the gospel itself was different in such a way that you actually made more progress ...

**JM:** These five men ended up, on the third evening, we all had dinner together very pointedly, and in the helter-skelter of the reunion you have to do things like that very pointedly. We had a wonderful dinner, and at that dinner these five men appointed me the one who would pray for them. We would do our best in five years time to report back to one another, and they left knowing that I was their prayer partner for the next five years. For me, that was a wonderful development.

**JMF:** You have entered back into the friendship akin to what you once had with them, in a way that 25 years ago your perception of Christianity you wouldn’t know how to do.

**JM:** I couldn’t. I don’t think I had enough healing inside me, either. I could, by this time, have enough inner healing, healing of my memories, that I could go into my past with these fellows without being so guilty and so ashamed, that I had a major in guilt and in shame – no, I

didn't have to do that, because Christ while I was yet his enemy had died for me. He had died for all of this guilt and all of this shame, so I didn't have to worry about it, I could do this with them. It's amazing what a good time we had.

**JMF:** You were also asked to give an address to the group.

**JM:** Right. Once again, I had to go back on Sunday after spending Thursday, Friday, and Saturday with the university people. Then I had to go to the Nassau Christian Center again and give testimony. They were after me to ... "tell us more about how you got healed and how you got delivered ..." and I said, No, I don't want to talk about that. Now, after 25 years, I want to talk about God and his freedom for us.

We are in Princeton. I had read a book by David Hackett Fischer entitled *Washington's Crossing* in order to get ready for this reunion. Fischer's book was handsomely done and it got a Pulitzer Prize. Fischer was willing to give us a tour based on this book of the Princeton battlefield. George Washington crossing the Delaware and on to Trenton and up into the Princeton battlefield. A lot of us, 150 of us had read the book and took this tour along with Fischer and James McCresson, as the historian in residence at Princeton these days.

We had this wonderfully rich day from morning and afternoon and we walked the walk from the Pennsylvania side of the Delaware, across the Delaware onto the New Jersey side and then into the woods and through the paths that the armies would have taken to march to Princeton and face King George's armies in that battlefield at Princeton. Along the way, along one of these wooded paths (Fischer calls them the conservative paths – that is, we were walking the same paths that the ragtag army of George Washington must have walked, because those paths don't change in those woods)....

There we were walking the conservative paths that the armies had taken, and somehow Fischer and I got alongside with one another, and I was telling him how I loved his book because I hadn't read a historian who was compelled to understand his subject, George Washington, in the categories of contingency and freedom. He thought he came up with this word contingency, and when I was telling him how much I loved it, he asked me where else contingency works. I said, It's an old concept, the early fathers of the church invented it, and it's fundamental to science in our time. You can read the concept of contingency in our scientific culture as well as in our Christian theology.

Fischer took down references to Tom Torrance's *Divine and Contingent Order* and had me

send him references to contingency from Barth's work. I was just delighted with all that, because I didn't dream I would ever get to witness to the leading historians at Princeton University, which I have obviously done. They gave us a marvelous tour to the battlefield and ...

At the Princeton battlefield, there was a General Mercer (famous in Princeton, streets are named after him and everything), who came from Scotland an M.D., and he was one of Washington's generals. He was on that battlefield and he was bayoneted about seventeen times on that battlefield, he died there. When they bayoneted him, they thought they had George Washington, because he was in full uniform. What occurred was that, when they made the bayonet charge, the American ragtags didn't have bayonets. They were doomed, because there's nothing they could do about it, and what I believe Mercer did was, in his full uniform, he yelled retreat and he took their attention and while they were busy bayoneting him, his troops got away. When they were killing him, they were saying things like, "Die, you rebel." He looked up at them and said, "I am no rebel, I am a free man."

That freedom, again, I'm much moved by it, and I hope I'll be able to write a poem about that sometime. It was that same sense of freedom – not a monolithic sense, the Virginians didn't think about freedom the same way as the New Hampshire people, the Massachusetts people, or the Pennsylvania – everybody had some notion of what freedom is and what freedom means, but somehow, contingency and freedom came together to give Washington a victory he should not have had over the professional armies he was up against, on his great horse.

Contingency and freedom are right up my alley. I could, with that same contingency, and with that same freedom, with the same freedom that George Washington won the Revolutionary War, I could go and be among my friends at Princeton University. It was really a wonderful feeling.

I took that sense of freedom to the church that morning when I gave my testimony, and I talked about the freedom from sin, the freedom from alcohol, and drugs and so forth, and the freedom to go back to the academy and achieve this or that in the academy. But the freedom to win, the freedom to live free – my text was the 2 Corinthians 3 passage, where the Spirit of God is, there is freedom.

The Spirit of God is involved on a contingent basis in George Washington's victory. I linked up the freedom of George Washington to win, with my freedom from sin, with the church's freedom to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom of God to all men, all men everywhere... This is

the God who will not be who he is without all men, and there is no separation between God and mankind in Jesus Christ. If mankind wants to conceive itself as independent, or alienated from God – that’s their mind. But it is not the mind of God for them, there is no separation, he has reconciled all things to him. The struggle is to get all mankind to understand that it can only understand who it is by saying, “yes” to God’s good “yes” for us in Christ.

**JMF:** Doesn’t that change the approach we can take in evangelism toward people? Typically we take the approach of “You are separated from God, God is very angry with you, and if you do these steps, if you say the sinner’s prayer, then God will change his mind toward you.” That leaves us with the need to always be ... (as Tom Torrance puts it in his book *The Mediation of Christ*) looking over our shoulder worrying about, “Is my faith strong enough, was my decision strong enough, am I walking the walk carefully enough.” We’re worried that we might somehow mess up this love that we have acquired by changing our attitude, our mind, and our ways.

But if, as Colossians says, and as Romans says, God has already reconciled us through his Son, and the success in that hinges only on Christ’s success in that, which is true success, then in our presentation of the gospel we’re really asking people to, because God is already on their side, has already reconciled them, therefore, they can – in perfect freedom, say “Yes.” They can repent of their sins and turn to him without fear that they’re not doing it right or they are not saying it well enough, or they’re not measuring up in some way. It seems to me it changes the whole perspective both for our own confidence and for how we view the so-called “enemies of God.”

**JM:** It’s taken me 25, 30 years to learn the meaning of that sentence. When I became a Christian, I was taught that I was separated from God and that God had broken down the barriers of separation with Jesus Christ, and all I had to do was decide to accept Christ and then I could walk through those barriers and no longer be separated but reconciled to him. That’s the gospel I understood.

To understand that there is no barrier, and if there seems to be a barrier there, it’s not one erected by God. God has torn it all down with himself, and he invites people to come to him, and he does that, as we’ve already said, while we’re sinners, while we’re yet his enemies, he justifies us in himself.

The hardest part for me – because you can’t really see this new way of beginning without

understanding that when we believe in Jesus Christ, we believe in the Son of God – that there is no Jesus Christ except the Son of the Father. You can't understand the relationship between the Father and the Son except in the Spirit of God. We have to understand that we have been taken up by Christ, reconciled to the Father, in the Spirit – it's not just between Jesus Christ and us. It's between who Christ really is, with the Father, in the Spirit. That's why this Trinitarian faith, the Trinity ... beginning in the light of the Trinity is so important.

Nobody is separated from that light. That light shines whether anybody likes it or not – just like the sun shines by day whether anybody likes it or not. That kind of a thing. What the relationship is between that light and the days and nights of people on earth is our problem, not God's – because he made it, and he redeemed it in himself. I have taken 35 years to understand that I have been given to know God as God knows himself in such a way. I had to learn that God loves me more than he loved himself, because he went way out of his way – became a “sinner” for me, did everything that needed to be done in my place in order that I could become his child.

That's the hardest part for people to believe, that they are a child of the Father and the Son, in the Spirit of God's eternity, and the link between eternity and time and our lives and the life of God has been solidly established to Jesus Christ. That's hard to believe. People don't do it easily.

**JMF:** We look at the Father as being angry and ready to condemn us, I think, and Jesus somehow is standing there in the way trying to keep the Father from losing his temper and moved to help us. He is the nice guy. But Scripture tells us that if we've seen Christ, we've seen the Father. There's no difference.

**JM:** The Father sent the Son. He participated with us through the Son, in the Spirit.

**JMF:** So if we want to know what the Father is like, we look at Christ.

**JM:** Tom Torrance used to say that he loved his time as a chaplain in the second war. In the foxholes where men were dying, what they really wanted to know most, “Is God really like Jesus?” They learned a lot about Jesus. They know Jesus was kind and went about doing good things and healing people and that kind of thing – a pretty nice man. But was God really that way? Because behind the back of Jesus, they have in mind that God is very, very angry with them. There's no such God.

**JMF:** We'll talk about that more again in another time together.

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God Chooses to Be With Us

JMF: In many of your classes, you focus on the concept of freedom and in particular, our freedom to obey God. Could you talk about that?

JM: I've given lectures and preaching on what we call the glorious freedom – a freedom that we do not naturally possess. Natural freedom is a freedom that maybe conceived as autonomy, autonomous freedom.

JMF: We usually think of freedom in theological terms, or Bible terms, or preachy terms, we think freedom is ...

JM: Independence away from God.

JMF: ... to do whatever we want, think whatever we want.

JM: Yeah. When you give it a second thought, created freedom – which must be freedom we possess naturally because we're creatures, created freedom has certain limits to it. For instance, you and I were made to breathe air. If you try to breathe something else besides air, you'll find yourself quickly in trouble.

JMF: There are boundaries to our freedom.

JM: Yeah, there are certain limits, so that without these boundaries, without these limits, there's no freedom to talk about. Who sets these boundaries? Who sets these limits? How is our freedom dependent at the boundaries upon whatever else there is? My courses are designed to say that whatever else, is not nothing, and it's someone, and it happens to be what I call the great I AM, the Lord God IS, as the blessed Trinity revealed in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

My job in my courses is to show students how the great I AM of the burning bush speaking out of the flames to Moses is the same great I AM who speaks with us through his incarnate Word, is the same great I AM who through his incarnate Word he has revealed himself as the Father, Son, and Spirit of the blessed Trinity.

JMF: By "incarnate Word," you're talking about ...

JM: The Word of God become flesh according to St. John's Gospel.

JMF: So, Jesus Christ – the Incarnate Word.

JM: Jesus Christ, yeah.

JMF: And only in him do we see God as God really is.

JM: Without him, we don't really know who he is in himself. In the Exodus tradition,

Moses has to understand that the one who is sending him is the Great I AM who I AM. “You tell ’em I AM has sent you.” This I AM has named himself with Moses as the Lord God, the Redeemer, Creator. The I AM of Moses is the Redeemer Creator of the world, of his people – among the nations, in his creation. That was something new in the way of God naming himself and giving himself in his name in the history of the world.

JMF: What’s the significance of that to us?

JM: That I AM speaking with Moses is not another I AM than the one who speaks with *us* as the Holy Trinity which we worship today.

JMF: In other words, the God of the Old Testament, who we often look at as being the angry judge of Israel, and we think of as being the angry God whom we must be protected from by the kindness and sacrifice of Jesus. That’s not an accurate picture of God, then.

JM: Not at all, it’s not an accurate picture of the way he is, in himself, it’s not an accurate picture of the way he is in his acts in history with himself, and we have to learn this. The significance of this kind of continuity that I’m after, the I AM of the burning bush, the I AM of the incarnation, the I AM of the Holy Trinity, is that there’s no separation, but deep and profound integration of the dogma of the church, with the biblical speaking of God, with the biblical theologies. You can’t have a separation – biblical theology over here, and church theology over there – which has occurred in our time, and because of it a lot of people ask this kind of question, “What’s the relationship between the God of the Old Testament, the God of the New Testament, and the God of the church?”

JMF: And by “God of the church,” it seems there are two kinds ... when we talk about the church and God, there’s one approach we take as preachers when we’re preaching to a congregation, or when we’re pastors – we talk about God as being graceful or full of grace, and forgiving, and patient, and loving and helping people through crises and so on, encouraging them to know that God is with them. And yet when we go to find a *definition* for God and we look in the creed or we look in classical theology, to some degree, we find words like omnipotent, omnipresent, and all-powerful, and all-knowing – and we lay out this list as if that’s what God is. But when we are experiencing God in day-to-day life, we want to preach about a God who’s more like Christ, and so it’s like there are two ideas of God going on ... Am I making sense?

JM: All those “omni” words I associate with the God of the Enlightenment, an abstract God, a God whose essence was so abstracted from the realities of history, that it was the biblical

theologians who said, “Enough of that God. The God of the Bible is not an abstract God,” and they begin to say, “All we’re interested in is the God who acts in history.” There was this biblical theological movement, where people read the Bible to understand God in his acts. Never mind God in his being. All that’s essentialism – Greek philosophy, that kind of thing.

So the biblical theologians, with this reaction against the God of the Enlightenment, lost a real ontology with the being of God.

JMF: What’s “ontology”?

JM: Ontology has to do with the logic of being. There is a logic of God’s being in his names, and in his self-revelation with his names, that we mustn’t lose touch with. We mustn’t let go of. We mustn’t think that God is going to allow us to do that to him.

JMF: Kind of the idea of how we *experience* God being on one hand, as opposed to how God actually *is*, as he actually is – in preaching or counseling, we might say, “God is best revealed in Christ,” and we understand what God is like in Christ. But we put on the shelf, what is God like in his actual being, as something we don’t want to have to deal with.

JM: Christian orthodoxy forbids us from doing that. There’s a lot of problems here. Let me try and get the idea that the God of the Old Testament is not the same as the God of the New Testament, is not the same as the God of the church dogma.

Many people think the God of the Old Testament is a God of wrath and judgment. God of the New Testament – he’s the loving Jesus – sweet Jesus, going around, perfect man, healing, doing nothing but good to all mankind, and he gets killed for it. That’s what we think of a truly perfect man. He takes it all, while turning the other cheek. “Forgive them, Father, for they don’t know what they’re doing.” He dies for us and is resurrected, and we have this message of his resurrected life that leads to the dogma of the church under the compelling reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, one God – there’s not two Gods.

The New Testament’s God of grace is the same as the Old Testament’s God of judgment. How can we think these together? I usually, easily show that the God of Moses and the God of the Exodus, and the God who reveals himself as the “I AM who I AM, you tell them I AM has sent you,” the Lord God is disliked right from the beginning. The people of God so dislike him that they make a golden calf for themselves, right on the heels of all that he’s given them in order to take them out of their slavery in Egypt and begin to take them across the wilderness into a Promised Land where they can enjoy life as life ought to be enjoyed.

To that golden calf, Moses is angry, God is angry, because he doesn't want his people worshipping something that he's not, and he is willing to kill them for worshipping their idol. Moses earns his stripes as an intercessor, intercedes for this people, and God agrees with Moses that he will go ahead and work with them in spite of their animosity towards him – I should say hostility, enmity – as it's taken up in the New Testament words.

He says to Moses, "I'll work with this people, but here is who I am going to be in this enterprise." And he defines himself. In Exodus 34:6 – I call it the little credo of the great I AM. And those five terms of the little creed, the little credo of the Exodus tradition, I like to say them in Hebrew, because I don't like to translate it in English, because if I translated it into English, everybody thinks they know what these words mean, and they don't. The words are: *rachum*, *hannun*, *'erek 'appayim*, *hesed ve 'emeth*.

Let me just quickly go over: *rachum*, cognate with *rechem*: womb, compassion, *hannun*: favor, that which allows subsistence, sustaining. I'm the God of compassion, I'm the God of favor. *'Erek 'appayim*, is slow to anger – very vivid in the Hebrew idiom. I am slow to, my nostrils to reach, to get it as wide apart as they're gonna get before I strike with my wrath. And then *hesed ve 'emeth* – very, very great words: grace and faithfulness. That's who I AM in the Old Testament with this stiff-necked people of God.

This God who's willing to define himself in this way with his stiff-necked people struggles across the whole history of Israel until he sends his Son. His Son – the Incarnate Word – is an embodiment of this little credo. Jesus Christ is *rachum*, Jesus Christ is *hannun*, Jesus Christ is *'erek 'appayim*, Jesus Christ is *hesed*; Jesus Christ is faithful, *'emeth*. In the New Testament, *hesed ve 'emeth* – I like to think of it as the God of the future, we call Jesus Christ, "God's grace and truth." So it's *charis kai aletheia* in the New Testament – grace and truth. This is the affirmation God has for the future of his people even though they're gonna put him on the cross. He is willing to do it for them even though they are unwilling to receive him.

That's how dogma gets to be what it is, because he is willing and he lives, we can have a church with a dogma. This dogma of the Holy Trinity is the same I AM that Christ claimed to be, and that he was in the Old Testament. It's onto him that we have to learn who we are in his world. It's a very big continuity there that people have a difficult time laying hold of. I call that the recovery of ontology in the biblical covenanted relationship that God has established between himself and his people, among the nations, in his creation.

JMF: So where does that leave the common person?

JM: The common person, whether he or she knows it or not, belongs to the great I AM of the Trinity of the Redeemer/Creator. That's who we belong to.

JMF: And belonging means what?

JM: He made us, he made us for himself, he not only made us to breathe air, but he made us to worship him. We are worshiping not him, we're having trouble. It's like not breathing air. Everybody was made to worship the one who truly is transcendent over us.

JMF: And freedom works into that.

JM: Yes, it does. How do we come by the freedom to worship him, the freedom to obey him? How do we come by that? It's a wonderful work of God in Jesus Christ. God sent his Son to die for us and to live for us. He did this once and for all forever, for as long as forever is. His kingdom is without end, the creed says. So once you believe in Christ in God, and God in Christ by the Spirit, you have believed in something that will never end.

JMF: Where does that leave the person, though, who's struggling? In other words, you come to faith, you make a profession of faith, you do your best to walk in the ways of God, you read the Bible and you try to obey God as you understand you should, and you find yourself failing, and you hate to talk about it at church or to church people because they might be judgmental ...

JM: Because they're not teaching the one who is, who he truly is.

JMF: Where does that leave you? What do you do with that frustration, that guilt, the anxiety of your failure?

JM: A couple of things that we should learn from this kind of continuity and this kind of ontological relationship between God and ourselves, is that God will not be who he is without us. There is no such God who will be who he is without us. If you think there is a God that's willing to be who he is without us, then you're worshiping an idol, there is no such God.

JMF: Unpack that a little bit. What do you mean "he will not be..."

JM: He will not be the Lord God that he is, without his people.

JMF: Let me see if I am re-phrasing that in a way that works. Are you saying that he has chosen to embrace us and never let us go, and that's how he's chosen to be?

JM: That's the God who is who he is. Yeah. His freedom to do this cannot be questioned. That would be like, "Who are you to create the universe? Who are you to send your Son to die

for me?” Once you ask that question, you better be willing to hear an answer, because he will not be who he is without you. That’s the struggle you see right across the whole of the Bible.

JMF: So we get back to our own personal struggle, then, you see yourself falling short, you’re saying that ...

JM: See him struggling with you struggling, and in order to give you a “yes” to say to him. Because he’s already said “yes” to you in this way with his Son. He’s already struggling with us. And he struggles with us in such a way that he’s going to be known for who he is, and we’re going to be the child of God that he’s made us to be.

JMF: Where does that leave me on a day-to-day basis? Let’s say I pick up the Bible, but oftentimes in the struggle of our own weaknesses, we don’t pick up the Bible, but let’s say I do. I read a passage about how God punishes his people for disobedience. I see myself struggling with disobedience, and I conclude, “I’m just going to have to sit here and wait till the punishment comes.”

JM: Or, wait until he gives you the freedom to obey. The freedom to disobey has to do with some kind of “no” down deep inside of you – that says “No” to him. I’m not going to obey you, who do you think you are with me? He’s has to take that “No” up in himself, in his love, and in his willingness to sacrifice himself to serve you – to be your atonement.

JMF: The person is saying, “No.” He said, “Yes.” And you’re saying he won’t stop saying, “Yes,” the Scripture tells us.

JM: There’s not any “Yes and No” in God. There’s only “Yes and No” in man, in sinners.

JMF: There’s only God’s “Yes” to you.

JM: Yes, that’s all there is.

JMF: So what do you want the person who – any person – a person who’s struggling, a person who’s not struggling, a person who thinks he’s not struggling – a person ...

JM: I want them to know that God will not be who he is without you.

JMF: So he will love you in spite of yourself.

JM: Yes. He will not be who he is, a God of love, a God of light and life, he will not be who he is without you.

JMF: There’s a passage about how he won’t reject himself, and that’s in the context of he won’t reject his Son and if he won’t reject his Son, and of all creation, as we read in Ephesians and Colossians, and so on...

JM: He's certainly not going to reject the creation, is he?

JMF: ...it's all taken up in Christ, who has redeemed it – so he will not reject you, then. That's a comforting thought in the middle of this depression, I would think, if in the midst of our struggle, if we can remember ...

JM: When you're mad, when you're raging against him, all kinds of aberrations and phantoms appear in this kind of mind. He's going to struggle through it all for you so that you can see him for who he truly is with you. That's what he does. How that happens to everybody, each particular person, it happens each particular person particularly. I don't know how to generalize that, I don't know how to formalize that.

JMF: Even with belief, there's a story in the New Testament where an individual seeking healing for a child says to Jesus, "I believe, help my unbelief."

JM: That's been a regular prayer of mine.

JMF: The belief, the faith that we wish we had...

JM: He has for us.

JMF: ...he already has for us. All the responses that we are supposed to have to God, Christ has already, on our behalf, made those responses.

JM: He's taken up all those broken responses in himself.

JMF: And yet we still find ourselves in this anxiety and fear and frustration and sense of being alienated from God.

JM: That's what unbelief is like. It's a fierce rage that we have against him. There's no way to explain it... If God is the God of love that we say he is, he's sent his Son and his Son died and rose from the dead for us, ascended to the right hand of the Father, sent his Spirit so that his Spirit in the world is where freedom is, you're free to be free with him, or free to be free without him. It's just two different places.

Why is it that some people can say to this loving God, "No"? It's not rational to refuse the love that God is. But more people do it than you want to count, as far as I can see. And even as good as he's been to me – delivered me from drugs and alcohol, and so forth – I've taken 35 years to learn how to love him. It's been a struggle, yeah. But it's a struggle that he wins, and I know that he will not be who he is without me. Go ahead and struggle away, because he's gonna struggle harder.

JMF: When does the struggle end?

JM: When we die.

JMF: If the struggle ends at death, then what about people who die and they haven't consciously ...

JM: He will not be, even beyond death, before and after death, he will not be the God he is without us. Before you and after you, he's got you covered. He's got all of you covered – he's got your whole time past, your present, your whole future...

JMF: And yet you're never going to enjoy this relationship, be it good or bad,...

JM: Not while you're saying "No." That's the problem, somehow people want to reject him.

JMF: Is that hell?

JM: That would be hell, in my mind.

JMF: Hell; just remaining in this "No."

JM: Yeah. People are living, do live in hell who have in them only a "No." People struggle to say "Yes" to something or other, just so that they don't have to look at this big "No" that they have down there in them, in themselves. They become optimists, they form clubs, they do everything to get a little positive view of things.

JMF: And yet we remain in miserable hellish condition until such time as we do receive his "Yes" for us.

JM: In John somewhere, what is the work of God that he would have me do? It's just believe, believe in me. That's all. There's a great cause, it's the real cause of freedom, and that's why I like to talk about freedom, because freedom is not "from this" or "for that." Freedom is to know who God is and obey him.

JMF: C.S. Lewis in one of his books, *The Great Divorce* – kind of an allegory, opens the concept that even after death God continues to persist as always in his love toward those in hell, and in the story there's a bus that goes back and forth regularly between heaven and hell and anyone who wants to get on the bus can go up to heaven for a visit. They can stay if they want, and in the story there are those who do, but strangely, most get back on the bus and are more comfortable heading on back down to hell. But they're still free to go up again if they want. I think in another place he likened hell as having the doors or gates or whatever locked from the inside, as a picture.

JM: I like that part of it. There might be some pipe-smoking theology in Lewis' literary talent. But I like "the doors locked from inside." You know that he's there, but you will not

allow him to come in.

JMF: And he respects that?

JM: Freedom ... is precious.

JMF: But he keeps standing and knocking.

JM: Yeah. He will not be your head, without your freedom. He will not encroach upon your freedom to choose to say “yes” to him. We’ve talked about this little conversion from your last “No” converted into a “yes” to his big “Yes.” The big “Yes” is him in Christ for us. There is no other fellowship with God that there is to be had. There’s no other atonement, there’s no other forgiveness, there’s no other reconciliation, but this one. If you’re saying “no” to that, you need that “no” converted to your little “yes,” and that little “yes” is the wonderful participation in the glorious freedom of God to be God with us. It’s a mystery how that conversion takes place, when it takes place.

JMF: God is at work in many, many ways that we aren’t aware of.

JM: Yes. Fundamental to the ontology of the great I AM is, the incomprehensibility of God’s mystery with us has nothing whatsoever to do with human ignorance of him. It has everything to do with what he’s given humanity to know of him. So only in apprehending him can you understand his incomprehensibility. Most people think incomprehensibility through some kind of humility that confesses ignorance of him is what we need to talk about. That’s not God’s incomprehensibility, that’s just incomprehensibility of some unknown thing. But when you know God for who he truly is – because he’s given you to apprehend him for who he truly is, you know the incomprehensible one. That’s gotta go straight through from Moses to church dogma.

JMF: So is there a sense in which God is continually revealing himself to every person even though they are continually saying “no” and to some degree, even those of us who have given our little “yes” – as you said – we still in many ways continue to say “no”

JM: Lord, I believe, help my unbelief.

JMF: There are lots of rooms in our life in which we still keep the door locked.

JM: Absolutely.

JMF: We just keep him in the parlor.

JM: Wherever.

JM: Keep him talking out there in the parlor while...

JMF: Have at it. But he's going to find his way there, because he does love you and he is concerned to be your Father, and our Father.

JM: There are people who can't love the Father just because of their experience with their families. I couldn't love the Father very easily, he had to teach me how to love him. Because my father; I didn't love so much, to put it modestly. But he does, and he's a master. I can say to you today that I have a Father. It's not like the one on earth. So I'm very grateful.

JMF: To me that speaks to evangelism a lot. I think we often get the idea that evangelism abides with us; it depends on us. It seems like the gospel motivates us to evangelize with all the vigor we can muster and yet at the same time to rest in our vigorous evangelism with the confidence that it really doesn't depend on us. God will be who he will be, and he loves people more than we can, and he will reach them...

JM: Much more so.

JMF: ...and in spite of our successes or failures or wisdom or lack of wisdom that we bring to the project.

JM: Yeah, we can depend upon him for his love. That's what *shalom* means, his peace. You do whatever vigor you do things, you have to be able to do it in a peace that passes understanding in God.

JMF: And when we see people as being loved by God rather than as enemies,

JM: We see the truth.

JMF: ...we see that he does what he does while we were still enemies, while they're still enemies, we can approach people as one of them, as opposed to...

JM: That's the truth of his love for all of us, enemies or not.

JMF: We've come to a conclusion.

JM: Don't say "no" - say "yes."

JMF: What passage, or what chapter would you encourage people to read after they're done listening to us ranting back and forth today?

JM: My favorite book is the Gospel of St. John. I started reading that in 1972. Chapters 15, 16, 17. I read them because they're all in red letter. "Oh boy, that's Jesus talking, I'm going to read those words first." Those words today are just as truthful with me as they were in 1972. Read them and listen.

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## **The Little Credo of the Great I-AM**

**JMF:** Today we are going to talk about the grace of God in both the New and the Old Testaments. Most Christians tend to think of the New Testament as the Holy Scriptures of Christianity. We have the stories of Jesus, we have the letters of Paul and other apostles. But the Old Testament is the Hebrew Bible, it's the Holy Scriptures of Israel – of the Jews. And yet it is included in the Christian sacred text as well, as Old and New Testaments. Why is the Old Testament part of the sacred book of the Christians?

**JM:** I teach two courses at the university. One is entitled “The People of God,” and the second is “The Kingdom of God.” In both of those courses I spend three months respectively talking about the answer to your question – which is the reality of God as his grace in the Old, and the reality of God as his grace in the New – holds together the two Testaments – the two covenants: the new covenant with the old, the old with the new. The only way we can understand the relationship between the Old and the New is through the grace of God. It's a very important concept.

**JMF:** We're going to ask you to boil down six months' worth of instruction to the 25 minutes or so that we have remaining in the program. That will be a challenge. But if you had to start somewhere, you would start with grace?

**JM:** Yeah, I start the course work with the passage in Exodus 34:6, which I have come to call the “Little Credo of the Great I AM.”

**JMF:** And a “credo” is a statement of description of who God is in this passage.

**JM:** Who God is in his covenant relationship with the people – his people that he's just delivered from Egypt and their bondage to Egyptian gods under the Pharaoh.

**JMF:** A lot of people think, “Isn't the God of the Old Testament more of a harsh, legalistic God?” where Jesus is kind and merciful – a difference between the God of the Old Testament, and God of the New Testament.

**JM:** We find that appearing right away in biblical interpretation in the early church. When I became a Christian, I found it in the communities where I fellowshiped early on. The idea that the God of the Old Testament is a God of wrath and law, and the God of the New Testament is a God of grace and sweet love, was everywhere. The divorce between them is something that I had to learn to overcome, more or less on my own, because a lot of people think that way and

continue to think that way.

**JMF:** But this passage you're talking about, where God reveals himself for who he is with his people, really gets at the heart of something most people haven't thought about.

**JM:** It does it in such a way that I don't even believe that we can read, for example, Genesis without understanding this way that God has in his freedom to be the Great I AM he is, and to define himself in his relationship with his people.

**JMF:** "The Great I AM" refers to what?

**JM:** I ask my students to, when you read the little credo, Exodus 34:6, you read it in the light of Exodus 3:14, the great revelation of the name of God.

**JMF:** Where he is talking to Moses. Moses says, "Who shall I tell them has sent me?" ...

**JM:** "I AM WHO I AM." That self-naming of the self-revealing God is ... You can find libraries full of books on that one phrase.

**JMF:** "Tell them 'I AM' has sent me, has sent you." Let's read this passage in Exodus 34:6, "The Lord passed before him (Moses was in the rock and God was going to show himself to Moses) and proclaimed the Lord, the Lord – a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness."

**JM:** Five terms which he's used to define himself in his covenanted relationship with his stiff-necked people. The context here is, "I'm defining myself, Moses, so I don't have to kill those who prefer a golden calf to who I am. I'm not going to kill them, and when I do not kill them, this is the way I'm going to be with them." Five terms.

**JMF:** You are probably, having taught it so many times, dying to give us those five terms as they appear in Hebrew and then talk about each one.

**JM:** I prefer to think of it as "*living* to give it to."

**JMF:** All right, go ahead.

**JM:** I don't even like to put these terms into English when I teach them.

**JMF:** They're translated differently from translation to translation – we were just looking at it this morning, and this translation is much more faithful to each word than the other two we were looking at ...

**JM:** I make my students learn the Hebrew terms – because they're terms with which they're not familiar, everybody thinks that they know what grace is, and it's very familiar to them.

**JMF:** Let's talk about each one of those terms...

**JM:** The five terms are: *rachum*, *hannun*, *'erek 'appayim*, *hesed ve 'emeth*. *Rachum* is cognate with the Hebrew “womb.” It has to do, as far as I am concerned, with beginning. You can't begin anything without the *rachum* of God. He is the God who gives birth, the way that the womb of a woman conceives her fetus. When you're talking about *rachum* (“compassion,” a lot of times it's translated), it seems that you're talking about the care it takes to begin something that is of God.

**JMF:** Compassion, and here in the New Revised Standard it's translated as “merciful.” That is the opposite of what this golden calf...

**JM:** ...doesn't have ... for his people.

**JMF:** In the second term...

**JM:** The second term, *hannun*, – has to do with the way that God favors what he's begun. If he begins something, he sustains it with his favor. So I like “favor.” In your translation they use the English word “grace” for favor or *hannun* – grace, I like to reserve for the term that comes after – the “slow to anger” term. Because that's the term that we can follow all the way through the history of Israel on into the New Testament. I think it's an important one. Don't believe that you are familiar with the way God defines himself as the “I AM” he is, as the Lord and God of Israel. Seek to allow him to show you the significance of these terms that he's used in order to establish himself in his relationship with his stiff-necked people, or people who prefer a golden cow to who he is.

**JMF:** What are the rest of the terms then?

**JM:** *'Erek 'appayim* is a wonderful, vivid concept. Literally, it is “long of nostrils,” has to do with a face, and an angry face will have a nose that has on it nostrils.

**JMF:** Flared nostrils.

**JM:** Flared nostrils, and when a face gets as angry as it can get, those nostrils are flared as formidably as they can be. When those nostrils are as far apart as they can get, he strikes. But he is very slow to get like that. So you get this slowness to anger, because he's got large nostrils, or however you want to ...

“Slow to anger” is a very important concept. God begins something, God sustains it, and he is slow to anger with it. I associate slowness to anger with patience – and with patience, the wisdom of God. You and I would not be here talking together alive if God were not patient, if God were not slow to anger, if God was not free and willing not to minister his wrath against us.

**JMF:** Even after he gets to the flared-nostril point and determines to punish Israel for its transgressions, its unfaithfulness to the covenant, in Hosea 11 we find a description of that where “I brought you out of Egypt, I have cared for you as my child, and yet you always rebelled and rebelled. And so finally, I’m going to just let you have the fruit of your rebellion and you can go to the Egyptians as you want to, only you are going to go in chains and all.” Yet after that he says, he can’t stand that. He can’t think of doing that or letting that stand. So in the end, he will bring them out from all their captors and restore Israel, and a prophecy of what he will do with Israel in the future through Christ. It’s not only slow to anger, it’s ...

**JM:** *Rachum, hannun, ’erek ’appayim, hesed ve ’emeth.*

**JMF:** There is a point where he blows, and then all is... when God gets mad, that’s it. It isn’t it. Because God’s anger is tempered with all of these other words, we haven’t talked about the last two yet.

**JM:** I love that passage you’re referring to in Hosea 11 because it’s an opportunity for us to learn in prophecy who God is. And who God is, is the source of his compassion and favor, his slowness to anger and his *grace and truth*, I’m going to translate those last two terms with. “I can’t give you up – not because you shouldn’t be given up, not because you deserve it, but because I AM WHO I AM. I will not give you up. I will not be the God I am without you.” To discover that source for the grace of God in the Old Testament is absolutely necessary.

**JMF:** “My heart recoils within me,” he says, “and I cannot give you up.” That’s his own response to the judgment, his own judgment that he’s brought on his people that they very well deserved. And yet he will not let that stand.

**JM:** In chapter 11 in Micah, it’s a father-son relationship, all throughout the rest of the book of Hosea you have a marriage relationship being used to articulate God in covenant with his people. You have the marriage between Hosea and Gomer. The first ten chapters and 12 through 14, all those chapters utilize the marriage relationship in order to speak about the covenant relationship God has with his people. But here in 11 it’s a father-son relationship. It’s very telling, because it’s in the father-son relationship ultimately that we have to understand the source of the kind of *rachum, hannun, ’erek ’appayim, ve rab chesed du emeth* God is toward his stiff-necked people.

**JMF:** Let’s talk about the last two terms.

**JM:** *Chesed du emeth* – I like to think of them as God’s faithfulness to what he has begun,

to what he cares to sustain, and to that with which he is wisely patient. The future of the people of God is what it is because of his *chesed du emeth*, or *chesed ve emeth*, I guess it is.

**JMF:** “I change not, therefore you sons of Jacob are ...”

**JM:** I like *chesed* as “grace.” We should always read “grace” for this term *chesed*. My students can spend the whole semester doing a word study on *chesed YHWH* in both “The People of God” course and in “The Kingdom of God” course, to come to appreciate the dynamic way that God is free to choose to be this way with a people who do not deserve him. That’s grace.

**JMF:** I took that course under a different professor and did a word study on that very word, just in the Old Testament. I found it surprising and encouraging and reassuring to see the way this word is used all throughout the Old Testament, and I came away from that study with anything but the idea that this so-called harsh God of the Old Testament exists. Instead we see the kind of God who’s revealing himself here.

**JM:** Think about this: God is whispering these words into the ears of Moses in this Exodus 34 context, so that Moses can understand why the enterprise will continue, why he will not kill his people. We can trace this – what I’ve called the little credo – asking my students to become sensitive to it. Throughout the whole history of Israel, from Numbers, from the wilderness to Nehemiah, to the post-exilic people, you can see the use of these five terms throughout that history whenever they’re going to be renewed in their relationship with the Lord God, with their Lord and God, as the great “I AM” he actually is, they invoke Exodus 34:6, in some form. Once you become sensitive to that, you can see the shape and form and struggle of God’s passion to be who he is in covenant with Israel.

**JMF:** It’s a covenant he established and he keeps it even though the people are unfaithful to it. He keeps it anyway.

**JM:** Their future is bound up with his willingness to keep who he is in covenant with his people – that’s what their future is bound up with. The last term, *emeth*, everybody knows, because it’s cognate with “Amen.” It is translatable as “faith,” grace and faith, or truth. Faithfulness, *’emeth* is an abstract feminine form of *emuna* or amen. Those two terms ought to be understood in the New Testament as *charis kai alētheia* – grace and truth. *Chesed ve emeth*, grace and faithfulness.

I try to persuade my students that the way that God has defined himself with this grace and truth in the Old Testament, becomes embodied in his servant Messiah in the New Testament, so

the change from old to new is a change from a pre-incarnate definition of God to an incarnate definition of God. That is, he's not embodied – he's talking to Moses from the flames in a burning bush in the Old, but in the New he is incarnate as the Word become flesh, the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Once you understand that, you see how he has poured himself into this covenanted relationship with his grace and truth, with this grace and faithfulness as the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

**JMF:** So we're not talking about some "other" God in the New Testament.

**JM:** The same.

**JMF:** We're talking about the same God who endures, who describes himself this way, endures with Israel and all of us are Israel, in that sense we are all in this rebellious struggle with God where we have our moments, just as Israel did. When we're very faithful, we return, and then we have our departures and our rebellion, and he's faithful, the same God who leaves us this legacy in history of everything that he has been to his people and his faithfulness to them – is the very God who becomes flesh in Jesus Christ. When we talk about the Trinity being one God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we're not talking about three Gods, but we're talking about one God, and we're not talking about the Father being the Son and so on. We're talking about one God who is in community as Father, Son and Spirit, and the Son who becomes flesh is one with the Father.

**JM:** The revelation of God. He is the way that God is free to choose to reveal himself to his stiff-necked people. What you were saying about the way we are in this relationship – if you trace that through the Old Testament, you'll see that in the Exodus, the people of God proved themselves to be stiff-necked – "I prefer a golden calf to whoever you are." In the book of Leviticus, they proved themselves to be high-handed, willing to offer alien fire rather than to worship him the way that he's freely chosen to give them – fellowship with himself. They try to create other kinds of fellowship with him.

**JMF:** We can read those stories and we think, "Israel was this way, and Israel was that way," and yet we're *all* this way and that way, we're just like Israel.

**JM:** You go from stiff-necked to high-handed in the wilderness murmuring, complaining and then beyond that, with the creation of the monarchy, you find a self-centered people becoming more and more wicked in relationship to him to the point where he destroys everything sacred to them – their Jerusalem, their temple, everything. But in doing that he's

faithful to his word for them. He's faithful to his Torah with them. That willingness to deal with a wicked people out of himself and to be their God, whether they like it or not, is what you find Jesus facing when he's born of Miriam of Israel, the house of David fallen, and God willing to make a new beginning in her womb to give us Jesus Christ.

**JMF:** He says he chose Israel for the sake of the whole world.

**JM:** Of the testimony of himself to the nations. Always, that was Israel's task. But she can't complete that task while she's worshipping cows or being high-handed.

**JMF:** "She" being Israel.

**JM:** Yeah. Or complaining and murmuring that the world isn't the way I would like it to be for me, and all of that.

**JMF:** Those sentiments are not unfamiliar to anyone of us as Christians. We are believers, we trust in God, and yet how often are we high-handed [self-centered], and wanting what we want, and trying to re-make God into the way we want him to be instead of the way he reveals himself to us. Yet through it all, he's faithful to us. He was faithful to his love for us, he won't let us go.

**JM:** Otherwise we're not talking. One of the things we probably should mention in this context is to remind ourselves that when the book of Genesis becomes a part of Moses' confession, it's in the light of the Exodus, and in the light of this great "I AM" of the little credo that Moses can confess God as the Creator. It's in the light of the great "I AM" that you need to learn how to read Genesis – that will solve a lot of problems in the debates we're having today. All we're saying is this great "I AM" was the pre-incarnate Word in the Old Testament and in the new covenant prophesied by all the prophets – he has come as the great "I AM" embodied in the person of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus.

**JMF:** All of the seeming injustices that we see in the Old Testament – I was always, as a child, we had to read everyday in Bible class, we would read through the Old Testament and we'd read all these stories in Samuel and Kings and Chronicles and you wind up reading the same story over again in many of those books, and the story of Jonathan the son of Saul the king of Israel whom David replaced, always troubled me because here was a very good faithful guy – Saul was not faithful, but Jonathan was, he was faithful in his friendship to David, and he was faithful to God, and he was a great warrior and a great leader – the people liked him because of his integrity – and yet he gets killed and does not receive the inheritance of kingship that's given

to David. That never seemed fair. It was fair to David as far as that goes, but not for Jonathan. And many other things like that. The girl who gets sacrificed because the father made a rash vow and so on. In Christ, all these things are resolved, because this is the same God.

**JM:** God has his grace with his people, yeah. You mentioned Jonathan – Jonathan gets killed because he's faithful to his father Saul, whom the Lord has rejected.

**JMF:** And Jesus is also killed because he is faithful to why he came and to us.

**JM:** Saul participates this way in the grace of God. He gets bad press in Sunday schools. But he should not get bad press the way he gets it in Sunday schools. Saul is God's elect, David won't touch him, he is the anointed one. David respects that. And not only that, Saul's sins never even come close to David's sin. Never. The giving of his grace to David rather than to Saul doesn't have to do with our measure of sin, the way we would measure sin. Adultery and murder is far worse than impatience. Impatience is what Saul's problem is.

**Announcer:** If you're interested in learning more about the little credo of Exodus 34:6, Dr. McKenna's book *The Great Amen of the Great I Am*, is now available at [www.wipfandstock.com](http://www.wipfandstock.com) [and at other online booksellers].

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The Vicarious Humanity of Christ

JMF: In this interview we are going to discuss the vicarious humanity of God as Jesus Christ. I'd like to begin by reading a quotation from a book—*The Mediation of Christ*, by Thomas F. Torrance:

To preach the gospel of the unconditional grace of God in that unconditional way is to set before people the astonishingly good news of what God has freely provided for us in the vicarious humanity of Jesus. To repent and believe in Jesus Christ and commit myself to him on that basis, means that I do not need to look over my shoulder all the time to see whether I have really given myself personally to him, whether I really believe and trust him, whether my faith is at all adequate for in faith, it is not upon my faith, my believing, or my personal commitment that I rely, but solely upon what Jesus Christ has done for me, in my place and on my behalf, and what he is and always will be as he stands in for me before the face of the Father. That means that I am completely liberated from all ulterior motives in believing or following Jesus Christ, for on the ground of his vicarious human response for me, I am free for spontaneous joyful response and worship and service as I could not otherwise be. (p. 95)

As I said, that's Thomas F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*. You were a student of Thomas Torrance, you studied under him and knew him personally. In today's program, we'd like to talk about briefly who Thomas Torrance was, as he passed away recently, and what is this vicarious humanity of Jesus Christ that he is talking about that I just read.

JM: I'm very happy that you read that sentence and mentioned that Thomas has gone to be with the Lord in heaven. The last time we spoke together in his nursing home, he said to me, as soon as he got to heaven he would look up Karl Barth and find out what Karl thought about the direction in which he had taken – Barth's theology.

It was a rather long sentence (three sentences), difficult to understand. We've already talked about the freedom of God to be as he is with his grace in the Old Testament. We spoke about the way that God, as his grace, had become the person of the Lord Jesus Christ who was our Savior. This sentence on the vicarious humanity has to do with all that God was able to achieve by

embodying himself in Jesus Christ and what that means for us. So I'm very glad to think about Tom being in heaven and you and I sitting here becoming liberated as Christ applies his life to us – that's the vicarious humanity the way that God is free to give us his Christ and his Spirit as the revelation of the Father – our Father and his Father.

JMF: Vicarious humanity – being human for us in our place and on our behalf, Thomas Torrance brings up the concept of “I don't have to worry about my repenting being good enough, because Jesus is repenting for me.” How does that work?

JM: That's a wonderfully relieving, delivering concept once you're able to lay hold of it. Both the Torrances in Scotland, James Torrance and Thomas Torrance, were champions of this concept. James taught it all across the world while he was alive. He saw that all Christians worship as having a tendency to be something that *we* do – the church does. We thank God. We sing hymns, we pray, we do this, we do that. We take communion.

JMF: And because we do, God is pleased with us.

JM: Yes. For James Torrance, that was putting on its head the real meaning of worship. It is Christ who is obedient to the Father. It is the Spirit that Christ has sent that runs the church. So it's what the Spirit does, not what the church does, that provides that kind of worship which is of the Father. They were always wanting to convert people from themselves, from that kind of self-centeredness. It isn't what we do – from beginning to end, it is what Christ does for us. Christ is our worship.

JMF: So, our faith is in Christ, not in how well we do the things we ought to do. Our faith is in Christ, who did all those things for us perfectly.

JM: He did it not just on the cross and his resurrection, he did it with the wholeness of his life – a wholeness of the life that is continuing – he lives even today. In the incarnation, you have to think of the word become flesh as the embodiment of God's grace and truth and covenant relationship with Israel, and you have to think of Jesus Christ as his grace and truth coming to be baptized on the part of sinners. John the baptizer is baptizing with water sinners so that they can repent...

JMF: No wonder why John said, “Why should I baptize you?” knowing that here is the Lamb of God who is no sinner, who has no sin.

JM: Yeah, the text tells us that the baptizer recognized the Messiah and knew that the one coming after him was greater than him, so how is it that he could be baptizing Jesus? Jesus says

to him, “Suffer it to be done according to all righteousness.” That is, he enters into the place of the sinner in baptism. He makes the kind of repentance as a sinner that repentance truly is, something that the sinner cannot do. The motto there with both Torrances was, “unless you know the grace of God for you, unless you know God’s forgiveness, there’s no way you can repent.” It isn’t that you repent and then God is gracious. It’s that God is gracious, repent. The one who did it as a man is the man Jesus Christ.

JMF: God has already done for you everything necessary, therefore repent.

JM: The repentance, obedience to the Father, obedience even to accepting the evil against God that is the world in the cross, and finally his resurrection to justify all that he came to do.

JMF: Many people think that the act of our repenting and believing causes God to change his mind toward us and apply the blood of Christ to us at that point. But that is not what is going on at all then.

JM: When we do that, Tom used the phrase, “looking over your shoulder,” you’re always wondering...

JMF: ... did I do it well enough?

JM: Yeah. The answer is, “No.” None of us ever do it well enough—even at my best I need forgiveness, let alone you should see me at my worst.

JMF: Our confidence lies in the fact that it is Jesus being righteousness for us that is the basis on which we’re restored to right relationship, we’re saved...

JM: He takes us to the early fathers, and both the Torrances used it often in this act. They would say, “What has not been taken up has not been saved, the un-assumed is the unhealed.” Salvation is the healing of the whole man.

JMF: In other words, when Jesus became human, don’t a lot of Christians think that he became human as the perfect human; he did not take our broken sinful human nature on himself, he only took the pre-Fall or the “Adam before the Sin” kind of nature. But what you’re saying is that he took our actual sinful nature on himself, and that *had* to be true in order for it to be healed. What he took, what he assumed – that’s what’s healed.

JM: He took Adam’s sin. He took Abraham’s sin, he took Moses’ sin, he took David’s sin, he took the House of David fallen from God, upon himself.

JMF: Isn’t there something about that in Romans 8, the first few verses, that specifically tell us...

JM: I think St. Paul is trying to say there that the reason there's no condemnation for the sinner is because Christ has done this for the sinner.

JMF: Let's read that passage. Romans 8, verse 1:

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, for the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For God has done what the law weakened by the flesh could not do, by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh. And to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

It's his assumption, or taking on of this sinful flesh, that allows us now to be walking in righteousness, but it's not our own righteousness, it's his.

JM: From beginning to end, his grace and truth, he is for us.

JMF: When we say that we don't need to worry about whether we repent well enough and so on, and we say Jesus repents for us, we don't mean, Jesus is a sinner and he's got to repent. We mean...

JM: He was willing in his freedom as God to do this for us.

JMF: We certainly couldn't do it for ourselves.

JM: He takes my broken prayers. He takes my wounded soul. He takes my fragmented mind. He takes up all of that and in the wholeness of who he is, presents me to his Father and our Father.

JMF: When we talk about the Christian faith being a life lived in faith, as opposed to a life of following rules, we're not talking about ... isn't it kind of a razor's edge that Christians tend to walk? On one side, we know that we are saved by grace and we trust God in faith to be merciful to us, to forgive us. But on the other side, we know that God doesn't do this just so that we can continue to be in rebellion and live a sinful life, on the other side, we want to walk in the kind of righteous way that Jesus taught us (and that we, as Paul put it, ought to walk) because we are saved. How does that come together?

JM: Because he lifts me to his Father – that I might live before his Father as his brother. That's a long way from license, isn't it? Grace has nothing to do with the freedom to sin, it's a

complete liberty from death and evil and sin.

JMF: Yet we find ourselves still falling short, still participating in sin.

JM: That's why it's important that we learn how to forgive one another. We can't learn that any place except with Christ in the Father – in the Father-Son relationship, the vicarious humanity of God in Christ for us is there fully mediating to us his grace and his truth – his life, his light, his word. That's where we live as believers in Jesus Christ – we don't have to look over our shoulders to see if we've done it well enough – we haven't.

JMF: At the same time, we care about that. It isn't as though we say, "I don't care."

JMF: Like prodigals. "Yes, Father." Who says, "Yes" to the Father? Jesus Christ says, "Yes" to our Father for us, even when we are still willing to say "No" to the Father. Christ will not be who he is without us. We said that the Father-Son relation in Hosea 11. In the Father-Son relation, we learn love and grace and truth as he is eternally Father-Son in the Spirit. That's what makes Baxter Kruger's ministry so important in Mississippi, because through the vicarious humanity of God in Christ, you begin in the Father-Son relation, to seek to understand who you are as a child of his kingdom. There's an awful lot involved in the vicarious humanity – when you want to flesh out the meaning of the concept, "vicarious humanity," you're always answering the question, "who is Jesus really?"

JMF: Across the page from what we just read is this comment that is also meaningful in terms of how we present the gospel to others. There's this tendency to present the gospel – the good news as "God does not love you yet, but Jesus has done these things and you can take advantage of that, IF you DO certain things. If you pray a prayer of repentance and ask God to come into your life, then he'll change his mind toward you." And Thomas Torrance says this:

How then is the gospel to be preached in a genuinely evangelical way?
Surely in such a way that full and central place is given to the vicarious humanity of Jesus as the all-sufficient human response to the saving love of God which he has freely and unconditionally provided for us. We preach and teach the gospel evangelically then in such a way as this [and here's how he gives what the message actually is to us as unbelievers, but it's a reminder of the way we stand as believers as well] – God loves you so utterly and completely [and this is to unbelievers] that he's given himself for you in Jesus Christ his beloved Son and has thereby pledged his very being as God for

your salvation.

In Jesus Christ, God has actualized his unconditional love for you in your human nature in such a way once for all that he cannot go back upon it without undoing the incarnation and the cross and thereby denying himself. He died for you precisely because you are sinful and unworthy of him and has already made you his own before and apart from your ever believing in him. [Then he goes on to say that]... Because all this is true, therefore, renounce yourself, take up your cross and follow.

The assurance we have in salvation, of our salvation, doesn't lie in how well we do everything. It lies in our faith, or we sense it because we trust in Jesus. Our faith gives us that assurance and window on what is already true that God has already done. At least that's how I see this... Torrance presenting what we just read in Romans chapter 8.

JM: I've heard him also say, when you understand God in this way for you, you have to understand that God loves you more than he loves himself. Recently, as I have been learning this kind of love through the vicarious humanity of Christ for me, the one who presents me to his Father in the Spirit, I've been watching people, and I know that naturally they do not believe they're loved. They're always seeking to be loved one way or another. But just sitting there and watching them, I can get a feel for this "they are unloved." They know that. They're always trying to do something to get love. To be loved.

Probably, their biggest problem is this: God so loved the world that he gave. This is the way he's chosen in his freedom as his grace to love the world, to love these people, and the accusation is because, in his freedom he's chosen to love in this way and not in some other way, well, then he's some kind of narrow God, he's not a universal God, and so we have a problem there understanding that the particular is the universal. The singular way that God has chosen to show his love in the world is something we despise, because we despise that kind of particularity.

JMF: You mean the fact that Jesus ...

JM: Something new, something particular, is also universal.

JMF: So the fact that he is a Jew, the fact that he is a man and not a woman, a Jew and not anyone else, and the fact that you must believe in him, as opposed to some other thing that we

come up with as humans – are all “particular”...

JM: Absolutely despicable! We prefer our “cows,” we said. We’d rather kiss our cows than know this love for us.

JMF: And yet this particularity, of Jesus, is how everyone is saved, it is not restricted to just a certain kind of person or certain part of humanity.

JM: It is the universal ... He is the one God – the God of the Old as his grace is the God of the New as is grace embodied. It’s something new. We can accuse him of being narrow-minded for choosing this particular way, and the way that we prefer to kiss our “cows” is fundamental.

JMF: “Cows” – you’re referring all the way back the golden calf of Israel.

JM: Our idols. We would rather have our idols save us than the great “I am” that God is.

JMF: This sense of not being loved, needing love, looking for love – seems to be a plague of our time. Who doesn’t, even in marriages, in families, we disappoint one another but we can’t see past our own weaknesses... Love doesn’t have a chance. But in the gospel, we are saying that God already loves you even before you ever believed or even heard.

JM: Sure. That’s a very serious move that he’s made on us. We’re going to have to take it seriously sooner or later.

JMF: The fact that God does love everyone means that everyone has to take it seriously at some point, because he’s never going to let up.

JM: He doesn’t call anyone somewhere else besides to himself. All people are called to him.

JMF: “If I am lifted up I will draw all men to myself,” Jesus said. Men in the sense of all people.

JM: If you object to that, that’s a problem that you’re having with God.

JMF: That’s again like Israel, always having to struggle as a type of the way everyone is.

JM: Sure, and as such, Israel even today serves as the disobedient servant to show us, to bear witness to, to give testimony to the fact that this is the way he’s chosen to love.

JMF: Even those of us who are believers walk in that same path much of the time ...

JM: We said, “stiff-necked,” “high-handed,” “murmuring,” “self-centered,” “wicked.”

JMF: We turn to God and yet we keep wanting to turn back.

JM: If you’re normal. Because we like that which we are habitually familiar with, much better than something really new. We like that much better. We’re always trying to get back. If I think about my time in the Haight-Ashbury, for instance, and people desperately looking for love

in those '60s and the kind of nostalgia that exists in our nation today for those times.

JMF: Where there was at least a recognition that we knew what we were looking for. We were looking for love and we knew it.

JM: I don't whether we knew what love was, but we knew we needed something besides what we had.

JMF: As usual, you get into something very interesting that we'd like to explore when then we've got only 30 or 40 seconds left.

JM: The vicarious humanity introduces us to a concept that takes us into the new creation, the new world of God in Christ for us, and that newness is not something necessarily having to do with what we already know. We have to be willing to become something new to accept him as the love he is for us.

JMF: Assurance of salvation is something that people want.

JM: It's right there in him.

JMF: It's there, in him, all the time, not in anything we do. Our faith is only in the fact of his love for us, not in anything that we can conjure up or worry about of whether we did well or not.

JM: If you're looking for assurance in what you can do, you're never going to have it.

JMF: Our assurance is absolute because it's in Christ.

JM: He is who he is. I am who I am. "You tell them, I am has sent you." When Jesus said, "before Abraham was, I am," he was saying, I'm here. I've been sent, and I'm the one.

JMF: Unfortunately, we've come to the end of our time together. There's so many avenues we'd love to go down and explore, so many branches and tributaries, I hope you'll come back and we can explore some of those again.

JM: We need to.

JMF: The time has gone by so rapidly. We just started, but we have to stop.

Thank you for being with us. I'm Mike Fezell for *You're Included*.

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## About the publisher...

Grace Communion International is a Christian denomination with more than 47,000 members, worshipping in about 900 congregations in almost 100 nations and territories. We began in 1934 and our main office is in southern California. In the United States, we are members of the National Association of Evangelicals and similar organizations in other nations. We welcome you to visit our website at [www.gci.org](http://www.gci.org).

If you want to know more about the gospel of Jesus Christ, we offer help. First, we offer weekly worship services in hundreds of congregations worldwide. Perhaps you'd like to visit us. A typical worship service includes songs of praise, a message based on the Bible, and opportunity to meet people who have found Jesus Christ to be the answer to their spiritual quest. We try to be friendly, but without putting you on the spot. We do not expect visitors to give offerings—there's no obligation. You are a guest.

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We talk with leading Trinitarian theologians about the good news that God loves you, wants you, and includes you in Jesus Christ. Most programs are about 28 minutes long. Our guests have included:

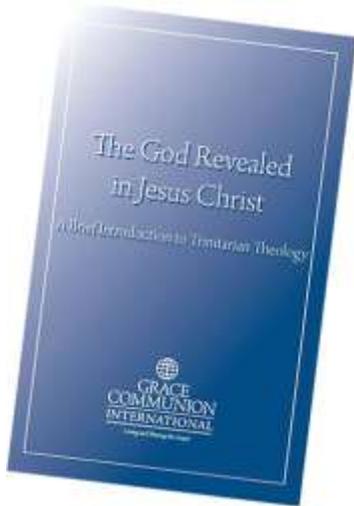
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### Want to read more?

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## Grace Communion Seminary



Grace Communion Seminary serves the needs of pastors and others engaged in Christian service who want to grow deeper in relationship with our Triune God and to be able to more effectively serve in the Incarnational life of the church.

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