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Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York

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Together for the Gospel Conference

Selected Scriptures

Prayer: *Father, we just again thank you. I just am amazed, this week has been a marvelous, wonderful week and I just -- I pray this morning as I am more or less giving a report about what that was, that you would accompany that report. I just thank you for the grace that was in evidence while we were in Kentucky, for the blessings that you gave and showed and demonstrated. And again this morning, Lord, we're going to be looking into many, many different scriptures and I again pray that you would open up your word by the power of your Holy Spirit, that we may again take things of permanent value from it. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well as you heard, Steve Sumnick and Steve Bobea and Michael Scaman and myself, we went down to the T4G conference in Louisville, Kentucky. I crossed another new culinary boundary, someplace I had never been, I'm always looking for new culinary experiences. This time was Papa John's Pizza. Never had that before. It's not bad, it's not great, it's not bad. Anyway, we were at T4G and T4G

stands for Together for the Gospel. And there's really no better description of what T4G is all about than their mission statement. So I want to just read to you again what that statement is as we start. They say this, they say: "We are brothers in Christ united in one great cause -- to stand together for the gospel. We are convinced that the gospel of Jesus Christ has been misrepresented, misunderstood, and marginalized in many churches and among many who claim the name of Christ. Compromise of the gospel has led to the preaching of false gospels, the seduction of many minds and movements, and the weakening of the church's gospel witness. As in previous moments of theological and spiritual crisis in the church, we believe that the answer to this confusion and compromise lies in a comprehensive recovery and reaffirmation of the gospel -- and in Christians banding together in gospel churches that display God's glory in this fallen world. We are also brothers united in deep concern for the church and the gospel. This concern is specifically addressed to certain trends within the church today. We are concerned about the tendency of so many churches to substitute technique for truth, therapy for theology, and management for ministry. We are also concerned that God's glorious purpose for Christ's church is often eclipsed in concern by so many other issues, programs, technologies, and priorities. Furthermore, confusion over crucial questions concerning the authority of the Bible, the meaning of the gospel, and the nature of truth itself

have gravely weakened the church in terms of its witness, its work, and its identity. We stand together for the gospel -- and for a full and gladdening recovery of the gospel in the church. We are convinced that such a recovery will be evident in the form of faithful gospel churches each bearing faithful witness to the glory of God and the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ."

Well, there's an old analogy that I usually trot out each time I speak about the T4G conference and I said it last time, I said, basically that the great nuclear submarines, if they needed to, could spend literally months and months under the Arctic ice. But when they do that, they regularly surface, not because they have to in terms of their -- their own life-like biological needs, but they surface in order to re calibrate from the stars because relatively speaking, the stars don't move at all, and no matter how fine the instruments on that ship, they all tend to lose their calibration over time. And as local church leaders, so do we. And this conference again represents a much needed periodic re calibration to a spiritual "true north" of Bible-centered Spirit gifted teaching.

The conference gave us an opportunity to sit under world class Bible teachers such as John MacArthur, John Piper, Mark Dever, David Platt, Matt Chandler, and others, and I mention these men not

just because they're known for their giftedness but because they are also known for their faithfulness. And they instructed, encouraged, and exhorted the leaders of the local church to cling to an authentically biblical vision of what the local church is supposed to be. And they always focused on three things: The authority of the Bible, the meaning of the gospel, and the nature of truth itself. The format is basically ten sermons delivered over three days, interspersed with a number of panel discussions and breakout areas, and after each sermon there's the singing of hymns. You hear ten thousand people singing hymns, it's very, very impressive, it's the Holy Spirit kind of busting out and it's just a wonderful experience. But as you can probably guess, there's an enormous amount of material to take in and so it takes a lot of time to process all of the information, to digest it and to see what God wants us as leaders to take away from the conference. And I think as you saw up there before the -- this year's conference, each conference has a theme and this year's theme was the word "protest," as the root word of the word "protestant."

Now if you know what the protest and Protestant is all about, I think most of you know at the very beginning it was directed at the Roman Catholic Church. I don't know if you know but next year is the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. That's when Martin Luther nailed his 95 thesis to the Wittenberg door and

started a reformation that resulted in the church splitting into two major camps. There's three camps but the two major camps that it split into is the Roman Catholic world and the Protestant world. And this conference looked at the Reformation and the causes of it and it took some time and effort to reiterate three basic points. First, what was it that caused the split; secondly, does the drift that caused the need for the original Reformation still exist; and finally, how affected by it are we?

So first, what caused the Protestant Reformation? Well, I think everybody knows that the Catholic Church was deep in the throes of corruption on a number of different levels at that time. And you know, most people focus in on the financial issues, which were many, but they are not actually what drove the Reformation. There's a popular notion that it was all about nothing but finance and basically what it had to do with was selling indulgences. Well, there's an aspect of that that's true. The church was desperately seeking funds for the building of St. Peter's Basilica. In order to raise these funds, the pope authorized Cardinal Tetzel to begin selling indulgences. Now, for those of you who might not know, an indulgence in the Catholic Church is the removal of the punishment you would receive in purgatory for sins that have been already confessed and forgiven but still need in some way to be paid for. Now of course we as Bible-believing Christians believe

that Jesus Christ paid it all and that he paid it all on the cross. 1 Peter 2:24 says: *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.* 2 Corinthians 5:21 says: *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* As Protestants, we believe that sin is completely, absolutely and totally paid for by faith in Christ's completed sacrifice on the cross. So there's no need for or even an existence of a place called purgatory.

Well, 500 years ago selling a means of escaping purgatory became a big business. Cardinal Tetzel became famous for this claim: "As soon as the gold in the casket rings; the rescued soul to heaven springs." Now, Al Mohler pointed out that there were many, many Catholics who were equally as exercised and upset by this crass commercialism. He pointed out one noble approached Cardinal Tetzel at one point asking if he could buy an indulgence not just for the present but for the future. He wanted to know if his sins that he committed in the future could be bought and paid for and forgiven in the present by just buying an indulgence, and when Tetzel said yes, you could, the noble then proceeded to buy the indulgence and then he used it to beat the snot out of Tetzel. I mean he literally beat him up knowing that he was forgiven 'cause he had purchased it ahead of time. The church no longer sells indulgences

for good reason, but they still believe in indulgences, and there's still things that you must do to earn them. I mean, the church today still believes in purgatory and it still believes in indulgences, and if you find that hard to believe, I suggest you Google the following letter that was written just within this last year. It's entitled: "LETTER OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS ACCORDING TO WHICH AN INDULGENCE IS GRANTED TO THE FAITHFUL ON THE OCCASION OF THE EXTRAORDINARY JUBILEE OF MERCY". They're not selling it but they're acknowledging that you still have to work for God's mercy. And as crass and commercial as the selling of indulgences was, trust me, there are plenty of crass commercial things that we as Protestants have to answer for, not the least of which is the prosperity gospel. So there's enough blame to go around for everybody in this.

But I don't want to obscure the real reason for what the Protestant Reformation was and why it took place, and it went much farther than selling indulgences. In fact, it went to the heart of what the gospel really means. And it was all encapsulated by one single theological term, and that term is "justification." So let me just explain first what justification is. Justification is a term that comes from scripture and it means on the simplest level to be made just. It means to be made, to be declared righteous. The Bible describes justification this way in *Romans 3:20*, it says: *For by*

works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it -- the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

Now it's that last sentence and that last word "justified" that marked the split between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism and it was the way in which each side understood justification. Roman Catholics traditionally understood justification to be a process, not a single thing that takes place in time but rather a process in which God and man cooperated in making man worthy of heaven. And according to Catholic tradition, justification gives man the grace he needs to produce meritorious works which in turn produce yet more grace enabling him to grow progressively more and more justified and/or worthy of God and heaven. And as the process is never, ever going to be completed on earth, man still needs purgatory to fully work out his justification and thus make himself worthy of God. Over against that, we have Martin Luther and the Reformation. Luther was a Roman Catholic monk and he was a man who was paralyzed by the fear that he would never, never be able to

fully justify himself according to this system. And finally he came to this scripture in *Romans 1:17* which said: *The righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY FAITH."* By the grace of God he finally realized that righteousness does not come through a cooperative effort between God and man but solely through God by virtue of faith in Christ and his finished work on the cross. Luther summed up his position by saying this: "The first and chief article is this: Jesus Christ, our God and Lord, died for our sins and was raised again for our justification (*Romans 3:24*). He alone is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (*John 1:29*), and God has laid on Him the iniquity of us all (*Isaiah 53:6*). All have sinned and are justified freely, without their own works and merits, by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, in His blood (*Romans 3:23*). This is necessary to believe. This cannot be otherwise acquired or grasped by any work, law, or merit. Therefore, it is clear and certain that this faith alone justifies us."

So what caused the split between the Catholic and Protestant churches? Different ideas of what justification actually means. To the Roman Catholic Church, it was an ongoing cooperative effort between God and man in which God did his part and man was required to do his part as well. To Luther and the reformers, justification

was completely, totally, and solely a gift given by God and applied through faith in Christ's finished work on the cross. Man was in no position whatsoever, according to Luther, to cooperate with God because he was so radically fallen he was incapable of even seeking after the help that he so desperately needed. In essence, God had to do it all. The scripture that I quoted before, this is *Romans 3:23* says: *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.* We look at that word that follows "justified," it says "justified freely," and that word is a Greek word, it's rendered in the ESV translation that I just read before, justified "as a gift," well the actual Greek means "without a cause", and what it means is that God justifies us, that is God makes us just without any condition whatsoever on our part. Well now some folks will say what about faith? Isn't it so that faith is a condition necessary is to receive justification? Well, the answer to that is no. Faith is the means by which we receive justification. And God is very, very clear to point out that that faith, that is saving faith, is a gift. It is a gift given by God alone. *Ephesians 2:8* says: *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.* So by grace alone we are saved through faith alone in Christ alone. It was that understanding that faith alone is what justifies us before God that drove Luther to split

from the Catholic Church. It's that understanding that undergirds everything we as Bible-believing Christians understand the gospel to mean.

So secondly, what -- we asked first, what caused the split? Secondly we ask: Does the drift that caused the original Reformation still exist? Wouldn't it be nice if we needed only one reformation? Well, that's not been the case, that's not been the case with our history, and that's not been the case projecting out into the future. You see, the drift that caused the Reformation is just a symptom of the sickness that has afflicted all of mankind since the fall of Adam. You think of Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve drifted, they drifted from perfection into disobedience, and after God through the flood had wiped out the entire earth, Noah's offspring drifted. They drifted into the Tower of Babel. After God raised up Abraham and freed his people from the Egyptians, Israel drifted. They drifted into idolatry, faithlessness and rebellion. You see, drift is part of the curse of Adam. And when the church was established in the book of Acts, Paul, looking forward to the future, describes in detail the kind of drift they could expect. He said this in *Acts 20*, he said: *I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.* The apostle

Peter said this in 2 Peter 2, he said: *There will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. And lastly, Jesus said in Matthew 24: "See that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead many astray. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are but the beginning of the birth pains. Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another and many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come."*

So it's pretty obvious, scripture is clear that the drift from truth to lies, from light to darkness, from faithful to faithless,

will always be a part of the battle for the church. That is to say the church is always in danger of drifting from true north and the danger comes from her drifting so slowly and so incrementally that we as church leaders don't even recognize it. Hence the need for the conference. It cost a considerable amount of money to send us to the conference, and the reason why we consider it so critical to go is because it gives us an assessment from outside by people whose giftedness and commitment we trust as to how our church is doing when it comes to us and the concept of drifting. I mean the people at the conference, they speak mostly in macro terms about the church and our country and in the world and we try to apply what they are saying to us individually on a micro level. I mean how are we as a church doing with the concept of drift? I know one of the things that I came away from the conference with was a conviction about how little we really understand of the gospel and of the privilege that we have been given in that gospel. Now it was stated on more than one occasion that you can't really adequately praise a God whose gifts you don't really understand. And the gift of salvation is without a doubt the most under appreciated gift that has ever been received simply because we lack the capacity as human beings to fully appreciate what is supernaturally divine. If I gave you a \$100 million gift and all you knew about it was a savings book that somebody gave you that had been rewritten to look like it was only worth a couple of

bucks, you'd hardly be enthusiastic about your appreciation of it. In a sense that's what the gift of salvation is. And to that end I want to give you this morning just one taste of one message that John Piper gave that attempted to flesh out what Martin Luther discovered about our radical inability to reach out to God on our own and the gift that God gave us in order to overcome that.

Piper's message was entitled "The Bondage of the Will, the Sovereignty of Grace, and the Glory of God." And what I loved, he opened up by asking a question that many of us ask today, the question was this: How much of my belief is attributable to God and how much of it is attributable to me? Or to put it another way: Are humans so sinful that God must supply virtually all of the energy for salvation? Well, by way of answer he went on to describe five different ways that scripture describes us as being bound and being bound so severely that we have no ability whatsoever to reach out to God.

The very first bondage Piper described was the bondage of legal guilt and divine condemnation. You see, ever since the fall of Adam, every one of us is born legally culpable before God, a God who as absolute perfection has no choice but to condemn and exclude those parts of his creation that have voluntarily chosen through their corporate head Adam to give up their perfection and embrace

imperfection. Now you might say particularly in our culture which has absolutely no concept whatsoever of corporate responsibility, that's ridiculous. I mean after all it was Adam who fell, it wasn't me, why in the world am I being held responsible for something that he did? Well, let me answer that question with another question. Were the German people in any way responsible for what Hitler did? And if they weren't, then why bother with reparations and corporate responsibility? Why not simply locate a Hitler and punish him as the one responsible? You see, if you doubt the idea, the notion of corporate responsibility, if you reject the notion that people can hold you guilty not just for what you do but for who you are, then you'd probably be willing to go to the Middle East and wave your American passport around and expect no one to notice, because after all, nobody in this room I bet has ever raised a finger against a Muslim. But you and I know they're going to notice, and you know that if you're in the wrong place, they will kill you not for what you did but for who you are, an American citizen. You see, as much as our culture rejects the idea of corporate responsibility, as much as we are radically individualized in the United States, the fact is the world understands and accepts that collectively we can be held responsible for the actions of one man. Now you look at the current issues that we have today with surrounding "black lives matter" and "white privilege," these are issues that are rooted in

different ideas of the extent of our collective guilt for slavery. That's a corporate responsibility regardless of which way it ends. It's something we are still corporately dealing with. And God makes it clear that collectively he holds every one of us individually responsible for the sin of Adam. That's just a fact. And *Romans 3* makes it clear, it says: *For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written: "None is righteous, no not one; no one understands, no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."* Here's the amazing thing. The amazing thing is that in spite of the fact that we all collectively stood guilty before God as worthy of condemnation, he still chose to die for us. *Romans 5:8*: *But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

Now the second bondage is directly a result of the first one. Piper describes it as our bondage of love for darkness. Listen to Jesus's words in *John 3:18*, he says: *"Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment: The light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and*

does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God." What Piper pointed out is what the scriptures says, it's not that the light is lacking, it's not like people were suddenly thrust into darkness and they had no choice but to kind of grope around in the darkness seeking somehow, somewhere to find the light. You know, light in the form of Jesus Christ flooded into the darkness. The problem was, as Piper put it, light is not lacking. It's just hated. He went on to say: "The darkness tastes good to the natural palate, and light itself tastes bitter to those who have no taste for it." You know, folks say how terrible of God to take people who reject him and cast them into hell. Well, I doubt people realize that heaven itself would be hell to those who want nothing to do with God. Kevin DeYoung quoted JC Ryle to say this: "If you could enter into heaven without holiness, what would you do there?" If ungodliness delights you here, why would godliness delight you there? It was Spurgeon who said: "Sinners cannot live in heaven -- out of their element. Sooner could a fish live in a tree than the wicked in heaven." You know when you think about it, why, why in the world would folks who love the darkness, why would they who love the darkness suddenly delight in the light? And yet it was we who once were in bondage to that darkness who now by the grace of God are capable, because of God's grace, of delighting in

that light. That's a gift. That's a gift from God.

The third bondage is the emotional bondage of hatred for the supremacy of God. *Romans 5:8* says: *For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot.* Well, Piper asked the question: How can you possibly submit to the very first command of God that you love him if you hate him? *Deuteronomy 6:5* says: *You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.* We have the New Testament equivalent in *Matthew 12* which says: *And one of the scribes asked him -- that is Jesus -- "Which commandment is the most important of all?" Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'* *There is no other commandment greater than these."*

Well if you doubt the dilemma that every one of us is in, just try this out some time, you know, the next time you're at a party, next

time you're at a gathering of people, next time you're visiting friends or relatives, the next time you're involved in a casual conversation with somebody who is not a Christian, point out to him or her that God's first command is that we love him with all our heart, our mind, our soul and strength, and just ask them, ask them what do you think of that command? Chances are pretty good he's not going to thank you for reminding him of his first responsibility and then try with all of his heart to summon up somehow a love for God that he doesn't have. See, the natural man is naturally hostile to God. So how can someone who's naturally hostile to God embrace him? You see, we were in emotional bondage to that hostility. We were in that when God chose to love us. *1 John 4:19* says: *We love because he first loved us.*

The fourth bondage is our natural bondage to spiritual wrath. See, *Ephesians 2* describes every single person on earth prior to salvation and it describes them as walking spiritual corpses. I mean there is a walking dead, it's described in scripture and according to scripture it encompasses everyone. *Ephesians 2* says: *And he were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you have once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience -- among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were*

by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. God is saying this is what your nature is. You are by nature children of wrath. It's what you're born with. And so we ask, how is it possible that creatures born filled with hostility toward God and subject to the judicial wrath of God could be anything but distant and hostile toward God? I mean, it doesn't get any more stark, it doesn't get any more deadly than for God to say "And you were dead." That's also what makes God's response to us all the more amazing when he says in the very next verse, verse 4: But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ -- by grace you have been saved.

And finally, the fifth bondage is blindness to the glory of Christ. *1 Corinthians 2:14* says: *The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.* What this is saying is the natural person, the wonderful, lovely people that you might on the street, your friends, your relatives, all the folks that you and I know who are outside of the kingdom, they think the glory of Christ and the cross is a joke. Now they may not state it in so stark a way, I mean they may have some respect for the religious traditions that they were raised around, maybe they don't want to offend you, but God is saying in their

heart of hearts they are convinced that the cross is nothing more than a joke, says *"for they are folly to him."* Understand that the scripture is saying to the natural person, this is normal. It says the natural person has no choice in this. The reason why he thinks of the cross as folly is because he has no other way to think of it. And when it comes to spiritual understanding of spiritual things, the scripture says he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. Then we add to that level of non-comprehension the satanic level of blindness that this entire world is under, *2 Corinthians 4* says: *In their case, the god of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*

So we sum it all up by saying this way we are in legal bondage to our fallenness because there's *"none good, no not one,"* we are in darkness bondage to our love for the darkness because *"light came into the world, but men prefer darkness,"* we're in emotional bondage in our hostility towards God because *"the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God,"* we're in natural bondage to our natures as children of wrath, and perceptive bondage as children who naturally see God's way as folly and foolishness. Add to that bondage an internal blindness that makes us not able to understand and an external demonic blindness that *blinds the minds of*

unbelievers so they cannot see the glory of Christ and you begin to see only the tiniest hint of the privilege, the privilege that you and I have been given. Our bondage has been paid for. We have the righteousness of Christ. Our saving books now have hundreds of trillions of dollars of blessings. Yet we can only see a few measly bucks here and there. And it is yet another testimony to the love and grace of God that he grants to creatures who can't even begin to appreciate it, blessings that will take all of eternity to unpack.

So to recap, we asked first: What it was that caused the split between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism? Well, it was the nature and the extent of justification, the idea of being made just or right before God. The Roman Catholic Church did and still does see justification as a cooperative effort between God and man; Protestantism insists justification is by faith alone in Christ alone. Secondly, we ask: Does the drift that caused the original reformation still exist? Well, look at *Romans 8:22*, it says: *For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.* You see, as long as man remains fallen, as long as the devil still rules in this world, creation is going to continue to

groan. There will always be a pull from light to darkness, and the greatest risk we as a church face is thinking there is no risk. I mean, the conference just reaffirms the wisdom of the scriptures which say in *2 Corinthians 13: Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you -- unless indeed you fail to meet the test!* Let me tell you the swiftest way to wreck the test, the swiftest way to fail the test is thinking you don't need to take it in the first place.

And finally, the third question is how affected by the drift are we? Well, you know, there's a reason why we named ourself "Grace Fellowship" and that's because we believe that everything that we have, everything that we need, everything we will ever need is given to us by and through the grace of God. And so I would say the conference encouraged me that we were on the right path and it convicted me that we could do a lot better. If I was to sum up my own personal response to the conference, it would be with these two words, it would be appreciation and conviction, a renewed appreciation for the incredible depth of the privilege and grace that every one of us has received and a conviction to tell you again and again why that appreciation should be overwhelming to every single one of us. As John Piper said, you cannot appreciate a God who doesn't amaze you with his grace. And you can't be

amazed until you begin to understand what it is that God really has done for us. And so to encapsulate it all, it's basically our job as leaders of Grace to fill you with amazement, amazement that the King of the universe became a man such as us, that he lived a perfect life and he took that perfection to the cross to pay for our sins, and having paid that price, he gave that righteousness to us as an eternal gift. And you know, ten thousand times ten thousand years from now we will be celebrating what we barely understand today. So what I want for us is the same overwhelming awareness of God's grace that Paul had. I want us to realize in our heart of hearts why the apostle would say what I conclude in, and this is *Romans 11:33*, he says: *Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen. Let's pray.*

Father God, I -- again, I just -- one of the amazing things about the conference is the sheer volume of information and the sheer amount of stuff that we learn about who you are, what you have done, what your son has done, what the cross consists of. Lord, it will take many, many eternities to unpack all of that. We are so grateful, we are so thankful for what you've done. And we are so

grateful that you are willing to accept the incredibly tiny understanding we have of the gifts that you've given to us. I pray, Lord, that you would expand our consciousness, expand our ability to understand just what it is you've done, just what it is you've given us and give us the ability to share that with the world. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.