

WHAT EVERY CHRISTIAN SHOULD KNOW

Introduction

The religious world is driven by **extremes**. Daily we observe both fanaticism and complacency. In the time of Jesus and the Apostles, there were brethren who wanted to allow **immorality** that was strictly forbidden, while others were **legalistic** about His teachings and also insisted on **adding** the traditions of their fathers. The New Testament speaks forcibly to both of these positions. In our time, those who would follow the teachings of the Master are also guilty of chasing the pendulum. Much has been written about eroding the foundations of the faith that were once for all time delivered unto the Saints. Men who once stood strong for truth now deny the validity of God's revelation, and among some, the word "doctrine" has become a target for ridicule.

Equally factious to the cause of Christ is a type of self destructive environmental legalism that produces a hateful venom which destroys the **peace and progress** of the Church. This study is presented to help us understand that in Christ we are neither licensed to sin nor are we destroyed by the burden of guilt because we cannot attain perfection by our own works. May we always strive to walk in the light with a joyous heart because of the Grace given us in Christ.

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New Christians are often **overwhelmed** by the perfect standard of life and conduct taught in the New Testament. "Be ye therefore perfect - - ." (Matthew 5:48). Some men are even deterred from obedience by the fear that they can not live the Christian life. Many in the religious world expect the Christian to be sinless, and like the Pharisees of Jesus' day, become the watchdogs and judges of the Church. Matthew 23:28, "Even so ye outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity." The other extreme seeks **license for sin** in the realization that perfection is not humanly possible. "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that sin may abound? God forbid. How shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer therein" (Romans 6:1-2)?

Our response to God is based in our **love** for him and our desire to **please** him. Jesus said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). He expects us to do what we can. "She hath done what she could" (Mark 14:8). We are not given a list of good works by which we demand salvation. Even if we performed flawlessly we would **still** be unworthy servants. "So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, 'We are unprofitable servants.'" (Luke 17:10).

Our hope is in grace while we strive to live in the shadow and footsteps of the Savior. "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we should follow in his steps" (I Peter 2:21). We can not disregard the written word and claim immunity in grace. God cares about the direction of our lives and he provides the perfection.

"But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (I John 1:7). In this study we will look at several New Testament words and concepts that will help each of us walk in the footprints of the one who set for us the perfect example. "...grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1: 17). Our **obedient** faith allows us to be viewed in God's grace as righteous. "By whom we have received grace ... for obedience to the faith. . ." (Romans 1:5).

Grace

This word is used 156 times in the New Testament and in several different ways. Sometimes it is used as a greeting (Ephesians 1:2). Originally this greeting was only used in the morning to express the joy and anticipation of a new day. The word also is used to describe "pleasantness and attractiveness" (Colossians 4:6) or "favor and approval" (Luke 2:40). Several times it is used as an expression of "thanks or appreciation for a favor" (Romans 6:17). **Most often** the word describes the **sublime** concept of God's Grace into which we are thrust by our **obedience** to the Gospel and wherein we live as we strive day by day to walk in the light. God's demand for perfection has never changed. However, even in our unworthy imperfect state, those who are **in** Christ are **in** grace and Jesus pays the overdraft for the imperfection of our efforts to live like him. "By whom (Christ) also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Romans 5:2). We learn about faith and salvation by our study of the word of God. "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10: 17). Grace is found in Christ. "...be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (II Timothy 2:1). We get **into** Christ when, in response to his will, we are baptized. "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Galatians 3:27).

The Christian Seeks to Serve God but Falls Short --

Grace Fills the Gap

Each person struggles with his knowledge of the Word and circumstances within his life. No one is perfect. "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God!" (Romans 3:23). Each person must rely on grace and mercy to obtain salvation. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:8).

Does this mean that I can live and do as I please without regard for the word of God and that I do not have to do good works of the Christian life? Not at all! "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). The works that will not save us are called works of righteousness. "... not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy, He has saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5).

We can not **work** our way to heaven, but the spirit of the servant is one that seeks to serve God and fellowman. Men are to help each other grow in grace and knowledge with a gentle spirit and love. ". . . ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness . . ." (Galatians 6:

1). Grace is not a license to live in sin or to engage in sinful conduct. Grace is abundant (II Corinthians 4:15) as we walk in the light, and the blood of Jesus Christ continues to wipe away our sins.

Grace works like a shower. As long as we stand in the shower, the filth of our imperfections are washed away. If we choose no longer to stand under the shower, but to walk away and live in sin apart from the truth, grace no longer reaches us. "...grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1: 17). Thus it does not give us permission to live a sinful life without consequences. Galatians 5:4 teaches that we can **fall** from grace. If we turn our back on God, we **forfeit** grace and face the condemnation of His wrath. "And do not fear those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28). Grace motivates us, and permits us to live lives that are right with God. "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (II Corinthians 5:21).

Justification

The words "just, justify and justification" are used over 140 times in the New Testament. The root word describes a **divine** act (Philippians 3:9) by which God looks at an obedient child and in spite of his imperfections and that he is deserving of death (Romans 6:23), judges him as right in the sight of the Maker. The word is a legal term that pronounces a man upright in conforming to the laws of God and man. He is **vindicated**, set free, acquitted, made pure and not subject to suffering the vengeance of eternal fire (Jude 7). The New Testament teachings on justification are closely connected to grace. Paul said, "That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:7). We are also justified by faith. "Wherefore the law [of Moses] was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith" (Galatians 3:24). Our state of being justified in the sight of God is a result of **living** by faith (Galatians 3:11).

Justification is also a **free gift** of God that came because of the righteousness of Christ (Romans 5:18). It was God's eternal purpose to justify the heathen through faith (Galatians 3:8). Justification comes to the Christian by his contact with the **blood of Christ** (Romans 5:9). Man is **not** justified by the works of the Law of Moses (Galatians 2:16). However, the good works of the Christian life **balance** and **activate** man's faith (James 2:24).

Paul reminds us in Galatians 3:1-7, that this justification came by the hearing of faith, **obeying** the truth, and not being bewitched to revert from the Gospel. When the sinner is washed from his sins, he is, ". . . justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (I Corinthians 6:11). What an incredible gift God bestows upon us. Because we live in Christ He accepts that sacrifice for our sins and **pardons** us. We are made heirs of God according to the hope of eternal life (Titus 3:7).

Sanctification

The news for the Christian gets better. Our baptism not only gave us grace and justification but we also were sanctified. ". . . but ye are sanctified, but you are justified . . ." (I Corinthians 6:11).

The word of grace is able to build us up and give us an inheritance among all of them which are sanctified (Acts 20:32). We are sanctified in **Christ Jesus** (I Corinthians 1:2); sanctified by **obedience** (I Peter 1:2); sanctified with the **washing of water** by the word (Ephesians 5:26); sanctified through **this truth by faith** (John 17:19, Acts 26:18); sanctified with the **blood of Jesus** (Hebrews 13:12); sanctified by the **Holy Spirit** (Romans 15:16); and sanctified by **God the Father** (Jude 1).

The word "sanctify" in various forms is used 29 times in the New Testament, but the root word "holy" from which it comes is used 229 times. Sanctification can **only** be accomplished by God who is holy or separate from sin. The word is used to describe God's action in **setting us apart** for his own service, or including us in the inner circle of what is holy. God chooses to see us and treat us as purified and separated from sin because we have chosen to **accept** his grace and justification. When we are sanctified we are preserved in Jesus Christ (Jude 1), and perfected (Hebrews 10:14). Since we are set apart for the service of God, we have responsibilities. We must keep ourselves suitable for the Master's use and be prepared for every good work (II Timothy 2:21). It is the will of God that we abstain from immorality (I Thessalonians 4:3), and that we be ready always to give an answer to every man that asks us concerning the hope that is in us, and we must do it with meekness and fear (I Peter 3:15).

Lifting the Yoke of Bondage

Jesus came to provide an abundant life (John 10:10). He set us free from the yoke of bondage (John 8:32). He offers this invitation, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30). What a promise! Learn of me he says, and I will **lighten** your load and give you **rest** and a yoke that is easy. The way that leads to God is narrow and demands a life dedicated to the task, but we are not alone. We bask in grace, justification and sanctification. The rewards are **joy** and **hope** and **purpose** and **happiness**. We must beware of those who like the Pharisees of Jesus' day would bind us with heavy burdens and make our life in Christ a misery rather than a joy; those who would look at life through the eyes of a vulture and feel that it is their duty to seek out, criticize, judge and correct every flaw in human character. Some day the Father of us all will call into account those who with pretended zeal have taken the delicate bud of a fragile soul in the cycle of its struggle to bloom in the sunshine of God's love and snuffed it out in careless abandon.

Paul encourages, "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again in the yoke of bondage" (Galatians 5: 1). The denial of grace, justification, and sanctification has led many to search for **human** perfection in the realm of spiritual service. The path to destruction has often been started with **promotional** rather than **transformational** preaching and teaching.

Promotional teaching says, "You ought to." "You can never do enough to please God." Catch phrases are, "Could have, should have, and would have." We hear people lamely reply, "I know I don't do like I ought to, but. . ." At this point many will seek rebaptism to calm feelings of spiritual panic. Having become slaves to the tyranny of the ought, we will move on down the

road to self depreciation. This will trigger low self esteem and shame. Shame convinces me that I am bad and without redeeming qualities!

The next step is **anxiety** . This will produce feelings of guilt, condemnation, and criticism. By this time we are back under the yoke of bondage with a full blown legalistic concept of the church. We make up our own lists of do's and don'ts that vary with location and culture. The next move is to **anger** . Somewhere something went wrong and we are not enjoying our relationship with Christ or His church. We feel anger and resentment since we cannot control others, who are not doing like they "ought to do." We are unhappy and hostile.

The final step is **denial** . We will either breakdown or breakaway and be lost to the service of the King. The **preventative** to this often repeated destructive process is **transformational** teaching. This approach says, "You can, by his grace, accomplish what God wants you to do: and this is how." We can adopt the words of the Apostle Paul, "But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain;

but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (I Corinthians 15: 10).

Guard Against Being Like A Pharisee

The strongest language of Jesus' ministry was leveled at the religious leaders who insisted on binding not only the law, but also the traditions of men, until it became a burden that neither they nor their fathers could bear (Acts 15:10). Always in your study compare the attitude of Jesus with that of the Pharisees and then follow the way of Jesus and the Cross:

The Pharisees said "kill the sinner" (John 8:5); Jesus said "Go and sin no more" (John 8:11).

The Pharisees wanted to **look good** (Matt 6:5;23:25); Jesus wanted to **do good** (Acts 10:38).

The Pharisees bound heavy burdens on others (Matt 23:4; Luke 11:46); Jesus said His blood would cleanse us all if we but obey His commandments (1 John 1:7; 5:3).

The Pharisees were **unforgiving** and **hostile** (Luke 11:52); Jesus was **forgiving** and **compassionate** (Luke 15:20).

The Pharisees were **unmerciful** (Matt 23:23); Jesus was full of **mercy** (James 3:17).

The list is endless. We need to center our lives in Christ and in our task of sharing the Good News with all who are still wandering in the desert of sorrow and sin. The request of Jesus is not a demand for sinless perfection but

rather a challenge to, "do what you can" (Mark 14:3-9). **Be** like Jesus. **Study** to understand the love of God and **pray** for strength. **Love** truth, righteousness and lost souls and remember that His grace reaches you!