

How NOT to Live the Christian Life by Grace

The Free Grace Faux Pas



JUSTIFICATION
by Grace

SANCTIFICATION
by Faith+Works

Dennis M. Rokser

**HOW NOT TO LIVE
THE CHRISTIAN LIFE
BY GRACE**

**The Free Grace Faux Pas
of Justification by Grace but
Sanctification by Faith Plus Works**

*Some Words of Clarity and Encouragement
to Free Grace Bible Teachers
and Those Taught by Them*

DENNIS M. ROKSER

How NOT to Live the Christian Life by Grace: The Free Grace Faux Pas of Justification by Grace but Sanctification by Faith Plus Works

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How does one live the Christian life once he or she has been born again? Or, by utilizing contrast for clarity, how does a believer *not* live the Christian life by grace? As important as this question is, it is amazing how diverse the answers are that you will hear even in Free Grace¹ circles in our day. I have heard the following over the years:

- *While justification is by grace through faith alone, sanctification is by faith plus works.*
- *As believers in Jesus Christ, we must do our best for Jesus if we are going to receive a reward.*
- *The key to the Spirit-filled life is the confession of our sins (1 John 1:9).*
- *Believers, you just need to wake up and get to work.*
- *Obedience is the key to true spirituality.*
- *If you are going to spiritually grow, you need to faithfully perform the spiritual disciplines.*
- *Witnessing, reading your Bible and prayer is what makes you a truly spiritual Christian.*
- *When it comes to the Christian life, you need to do your best and then trust God to do the rest.*
- *While justification is God's work, sanctification and spiritual growth is man's work and efforts.*

1. While I believe that salvation is provided “freely by His grace” (Rom. 3:24), I am reluctant to overly identify with the Free Grace movement due to a number of doctrinal positions many in the movement presently embrace like the crossless gospel, outer darkness for unfaithful believers, etc. On the other hand, I certainly enjoy great fellowship among those who hold fast to “true grace” (1 Peter 5:12). If you want to learn more about the crossless gospel controversy, you can access free pdf copies of Thomas Stegall’s two books on the subject (*The Gospel of the Christ* and *That You May Believe*) at: gracegospelpress.org/free-downloads/

- *Your faithfulness and good works for Jesus Christ now will determine whether you receive a reward at the Judgment Seat of Christ or punitive damages involving outer darkness with wailing and gnashing of teeth.*
- *Believers should also be motivated by the knowledge that their heavenly Father both blesses obedience and disciplines disobedience in His children (Heb. 12:3-11; Lev. 26:1-45).*

The Grace Disconnect

If these statements do not bother you or raise alarm, you are probably guilty of what one Bible teacher calls a “grace disconnect.” Of course, I believe the Bible teaches there is a place in the Christian life for obedience, submission, good works, witnessing, reading your Bible, prayer, faithfulness, confession of sins, future rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ, and other things. This is without debate and is not really the issue at hand.

Ephesians 2:8-10 make it abundantly clear that good works can never save a lost sinner, as only God’s grace through faith in Christ alone can accomplish this; however, God has designed good works to have a place in the believer’s sanctification that “we should walk in them” (2:10).

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:8-10)

Yet *how* these good works or spiritual activities are approached and produced in the life of the believer in Christ are of the utmost importance under grace.

but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen. (2 Peter 3:18)

Grace Is Foreign to Our Thinking

Dear reader, the grace of God is foreign to our natural thinking as we are ever prone to conclude: you get what you work for, earn, and deserve. Yet the concept of God's grace incredibly teaches the very opposite, for grace (Gr. *charis*) refers to God's undeserved kindness offered in gift form because of who God is and what Jesus Christ has done for us.

But **God**, who is rich in **mercy**, because of **His great love** with which **He loved us**, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (**by grace you have been saved**), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places **in Christ Jesus**, that in the ages to come **He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus**. (Ephesians 2:4-7)

The well-worn acrostic is on target as G-R-A-C-E is:

- God's
- Riches and Resources
- At
- Christ's
- Expense

Thus, as Church Age believers, we live under grace in the dispensation of grace (Eph. 3:2), when Jew and Gentile become one in the body of Christ (the Church) through faith in Christ alone as presented in the Gospel (Eph. 3:2-8). We are not under law like Israel was for their sanctification, but totally under grace (Rom. 6:14). So, consider some of the great blessings connected with God's grace toward us in Christ.

The Importance of Grace

The believer in Christ:

- a. has constant ACCESS to God's grace. (Romans 5:2)
- b. is to GROW in grace. (2 Peter 3:18)
- c. is to CONTINUE in grace. (Acts 13:43)
- d. is to SERVE by grace. (1 Corinthians 15:10)
- e. is to become ESTABLISHED with grace. (Hebrews 13:9)
- f. is not to MISUSE the grace of God as a license to sin. (Romans 6:1)
- g. is to be reminded that in every trial that God's grace is SUFFICIENT. (2 Corinthians 12:9)
- h. is to be warned that "God resists the PROUD but gives grace to the HUMBLE." (James. 4:6)
- i. is to abound in GIVING by grace. (2 Corinthians 8:7-9)
- j. is not to FALL from the truths of grace. (Galatians 5:4)
- k. is to SING with grace in his or her heart to the Lord. (Colossians 3:16)
- l. is to be DISCIPLINED by God's grace. (Titus 2:11-13)
- m. can FAIL the grace of God. (Hebrews 12:15)
- n. is to MINISTER to others with their SPIRITUAL GIFTS by God's grace. (1 Peter 4:10-11)
- o. needs to respond to the riches of God's grace by a willingness to YIELD to the Lord and be internally TRANSFORMED in order to do God's will. (Romans 12:1-2)

p. is to FORGIVE others because God forgave them in Christ by grace. (Ephesians 4:32)

Keep in mind that the grace of God is never to be viewed or abused as a license to sin (Romans 6:1, 15) but instead forms the basis and acts as the means of glorifying God and serving others in love.

For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. (Galatians 5:13)

My appeal to you in writing this booklet is for all of us to grasp in a greater way not only that *salvation from sin's penalty* is solely by God's grace (justification before God) but also the need to grow in our understanding and clearly teach that *salvation from sin's power* is solely by God's grace (sanctification in time). This grace understanding is imperative as Paul wrote years ago:

But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. (2 Corinthians 11:3)



Some Modern Historical Context

During the 1980s in the USA, there was a theological battle waged (which continues today) regarding the most

important issue of all—the Gospel of eternal salvation. While all agreed that eternal salvation is by Grace Alone (Sola Gratia) through Faith alone (Sola Fide) in Christ alone (Solus Christus) as the Reformation formally espoused, there was a serious and significant redefining of these biblical terms.

The false teaching of Lordship Salvation redefined “faith” to involve such conditions as turning from one’s sins (their view of repentance), followed by a willingness to totally surrender and pursue a costly commitment of discipleship obedience to the Lordship/Mastery of Jesus Christ over your life. This would then be evidenced by ongoing fruitfulness and faithful perseverance for the rest of your life, or else the “Christian” was supposedly never genuinely saved or elected by God. All these conditions (*works*) were subsumed under their understanding of “saving faith” which allegedly was the “gift of God” so that these *works* didn’t sound like *works*.

Such notable authors and teachers as John MacArthur Jr., John Piper, R.C. Sproul, and many others, especially of strong Calvinistic persuasion, championed this view of Lordship Salvation which was embraced by many in evangelical circles and deeply impacted many seminaries and churches. These comments are not designed as a negative attack on their personal lives, motives, sincerity, or salvation. Rather, I think you would agree that we should examine and evaluate their teaching of Lordship Salvation under the searchlight and final standard of the Scriptures as no one is beyond the scrutiny of the Scriptures, even an apostle (Acts 17:10-12)?

The Gospel Wars

MacArthur’s landmark book, *The Gospel According to Jesus* (1988), especially seemed to set off this doctrinal controversy and firestorm afresh, and rightly so in my opinion, as this book (and his many other books to fol-

low) presented a false and divergent view of the Gospel of grace based upon faulty exegesis and forced eisegesis of various scriptural texts. In doctrinal response and contrast to LS, there were several notable Free Grace Bible teachers and authors that opposed the LS view. Some of their books, along with MacArthur's, are shown below by year, title, and author.

- 1988 - *The Gospel According to Jesus* by John MacArthur
- 1989 - *So Great Salvation* by Charles Ryrie
- 1989 - *Absolutely Free* by Zane Hodges
- 1990 - *The Grace Awakening* by Charles Swindoll
- 1991 - *Sin, the Savior, and Salvation* by Robert Lightner
- 1992 - *The Gospel Under Siege* by Zane Hodges
- 1992 - *Saved Without A Doubt* (1 John) by John MacArthur
- 1993 - *Faith Works: The Gospel According to the Apostles* by John MacArthur
- 2003 - *Hard to Believe* by John MacArthur
- Many others

The value of a doctrinal controversy like this is that it normally results in believers studying more deeply in the Word of God to acquire greater scriptural clarity as long as sound biblical exegesis and not a theological system (like Calvinism) drives the bus to the finish line. As if anticipating this critical issue years ago and battling similar issues in their day, Lewis Sperry Chafer and the faculty of Dallas Theological Seminary developed the following clarity in their DTS Doctrinal Statement, which at least on paper (though not always in classrooms) remains intact yet today.

Article VII – Salvation Only Through Christ

We believe that, owing to universal death through sin, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless born again; and that no degree of reformation however great, no attainments in morality however high, no culture however attractive, no baptism or other ordinance however administered, can help the sinner to take even one step toward heaven; but a new nature imparted from above, a new life implanted by the Holy Spirit through the Word, is absolutely essential to salvation, and only those thus saved are sons of God. We believe, also, that our redemption has been accomplished solely by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, who was made to be sin and was made a curse for us, dying in our room and stead; and that no repentance, no feeling, no faith, no good resolutions, no sincere efforts, no submission to the rules and regulations of any church, nor all the churches that have existed since the days of the Apostles can add in the very least degree to the value of the blood, or to the merit of the finished work wrought for us by Him who united in His person true and proper deity with perfect and sinless humanity (Lev. 17:11; Isa. 64:6; Matt. 26:28; John 3:7-18; Rom. 5:6-9; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13; 6:15; Eph. 1:7; Phil. 3:4-9; Titus 3:5; James 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:18-19, 23).

We believe that the new birth of the believer comes only through faith in Christ and that repentance is a vital part of believing, and is in no way, in itself, a separate and independent condition of salvation; nor are any other acts, such as confession, baptism, prayer, or faithful service, to be added to believing as a condition of salvation (John 1:12; 3:16, 18, 36; 5:24; 6:29; Acts 13:39; 16:31; Rom. 1:16-17; 3:22, 26; 4:5; 10:4; Gal. 3:22).

Article VIII – The Extent of Salvation

We believe that when an unregenerate person exercises that faith in Christ which is illustrated and described as such in the New Testament, he passes immediately out of spiritual death into spiritual life, and from the old creation into the new; being justified from all things, accepted before the Father according as Christ His Son is accepted, loved as Christ is loved, having his place and portion as linked to Him and one with Him forever. Though the saved one may have occasion to grow in the realization of his blessings and to know a fuller measure of divine power through the yielding of his life more fully to God, he is, as soon as he is saved, in possession of every spiritual blessing and absolutely complete in Christ, and is therefore in no way required by God to seek a so-called “second blessing,” or a “second work of grace” (John 5:24; 17:23; Acts 13:39; Rom. 5:1; 1 Cor. 3:21–23; Eph. 1:3; Col. 2:10; 1 John 4:17; 5:11–12).

Article IX – Sanctification

We believe that sanctification, which is a setting-apart unto God, is threefold: It is already complete for every saved person because his position toward God is the same as Christ’s position. Since the believer is in Christ, he is set apart unto God in the measure in which Christ is set apart unto God. We believe, however, that he retains his sin nature, which cannot be eradicated in this life. Therefore, while the standing of the Christian in Christ is perfect, his present state is no more perfect than his experience in daily life. There is, therefore, a progressive sanctification wherein the Christian is to “grow in grace,” and to “be changed” by the unhindered power of the Spirit. We believe also that the child of God will yet be fully sanctified in his state as he is now sanctified in his standing in

Christ when he shall see his Lord and shall be “like Him” (John 17:17; 2 Cor. 3:18; 7:1; Eph. 4:24; 5:25–27; 1 Thess. 5:23; Heb. 10:10, 14; 12:10).

I believe that many in Free Grace circles would declare a hearty “amen” to these DTS doctrinal declarations on the clarity of the Gospel by God’s grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone and His finished work alone (1 Cor. 15:1-4). In addition, we would agree with distinguishing justification before God from progressive sanctification in the believer’s life.

The Three Tenses of Salvation Are All by God’s Grace

However, while we would reject LS teaching or any works-based Gospel message for one’s *justification* before God, could it be that we are inadvertently teaching a *works-based sanctification* to believers in Christ? What is the only human response that is non-meritorious and consistent with God’s grace?

For by **grace** you have been saved through **faith**, and that **not of yourselves**; it is the **gift of God, not of works**, lest anyone should boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

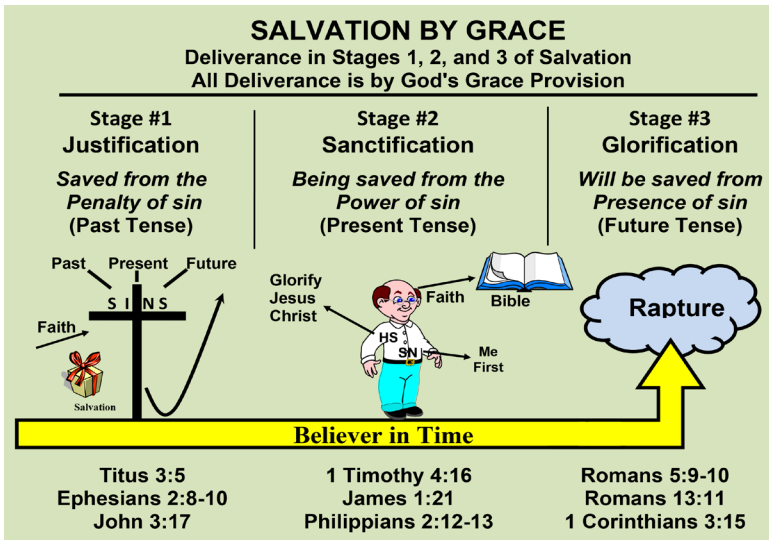
Now to him who **works**, the wages are **not counted as grace** but as debt. But to him who **does not work but believes** on Him who justifies the ungodly, **his faith** is accounted for righteousness (Romans 4:4-5)

Therefore it is **of faith** that it might be according **to grace**, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all (Romans 4:16)

And if by grace, then it is **no longer of works**; oth-

erwise **grace is no longer grace**. But if it is **of works**, it is **no longer grace**; otherwise **work is no longer work**. (Romans 11:6)

If the only response consistent with God’s grace is faith alone in Christ alone, since both grace and faith are non-meritorious, could it be that we are making a significant mistake or faux pas when it comes to our teaching of practical and progressive sanctification as it relates to the 2nd tense or phase (salvation from sin’s power) in the three tenses/phases of God’s plan of salvation?²

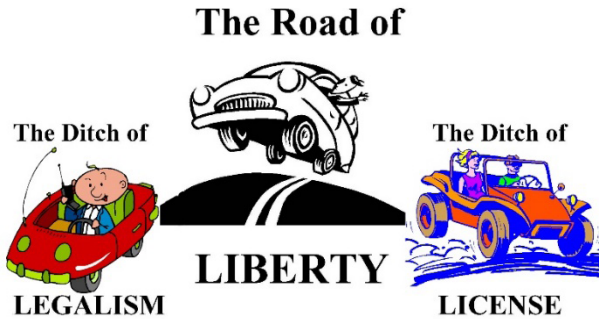


Avoiding the Ditches

Is the Christian’s practical and progressive sanctification by God’s grace, or is it by works, for it cannot be both? Could it be that while discerning the doctrinal errors of LS which imposes “works” as a condition for justifica-

2. For more on the 3 tenses/phases of salvation, see Dennis M. Rokser, *Salvation in Three Time Zones* (Duluth, MN: Grace Gospel Press, 2013).

tion (though calling it “grace”), that we in FG circles may be duplicating these same errors regarding the teaching of practical sanctification? Could it also be that while we are seeking to avoid the ditch of *license* (Romans 6) in our teaching of grace, that we are accidentally backing into the ditch of *legalism* (Romans 7) and do not even recognize it? I fear that too often this may be the case.



Weakness Incarnate

Years ago, Miles Stanford insightfully penned, “Our Father knows that we are weakness incarnate; that we can do nothing. The trouble is that we do not know it. He must bring us all to the place where we see that we are utterly weak and helpless.” Is not this what Paul declared?

Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God (2 Corinthians 3:5)

And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Corinthians 12:9-10)

We understood these twin critical truths (our total insufficiency and God's total sufficiency) regarding our justification before God, but are they any less true when it comes to our practical sanctification and service for Christ? Are we really able to fulfill the will of God and even hundreds of commands or imperatives in the New Testament Epistles for the Church in our own strength and wisdom? How do we approach this issue under grace?

Faith: The Only Response Consistent with Grace

How can we state that the Christian life is *all by grace* and then not conclude that it can only be *lived by faith in Jesus Christ empowered by the Holy Spirit* and not by our works or self-effort as too many in Free Grace circles espouse? Consider the following verses regarding the Christian life related to living by faith in practical sanctification:

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. (Galatians 2:20)

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:1-2a)

But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. (Hebrews 11:6)

For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails

anything, but faith working through love. (Galatians 5:5-6)

The Same Problem Years Ago

Over one hundred years ago, C.I. Scofield estimated that ninety percent of believers in Christ did not understand *how* to live the Christian life by grace. In 1953, Norman B. Harrison concurred when he wrote:

There is a constant emphasis on externals in current Christian thinking. This directly fosters the greatest error in Christendom: Behaviorism. The popular conception of the Christian life is that it consists of conduct: behave yourself in a certain way; do this, don't do that. It's a subtle error: show yourself a good Christian by behaving as one. The net result is that churches are substituting activity and programs for the real life, and we are busy rearing a generation of superficial, surface Christians. (*New Testament Living*, p. 5)

We cannot overestimate the importance of these truths when perhaps 90 percent of Christians neither recognize or realize the In-living Christ. Nor can we be charged with slighting life's outwardness in Christian conduct; genuine New Testament inwardness insures its outwardness of expression. (*New Testament Living*, p. 6)

Do you think that the percentages are better among believers today? Are not many echoing the same thoughts as the apostle Paul before he understood the keys to victory?

For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find.
(Romans 7:18)

Just like LS proponents desire believers to be faithful and fruitful and not to persist in carnality (though LS robs them of the absolute assurance of salvation if they do not), we in FG circles also desire for believers to live godly lives to the glory of God. But “how” is this accomplished? Are we teaching a Romans 7 approach of “try harder to be obedient” or the “more” approach of more Bible study, more prayer, more commitment for sanctification? Or, are we embracing and teaching a Romans 6 and 8 grace approach of walking by faith in view of one’s position in Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit? Remember how Paul understood the importance of grace regarding all three phases of salvation in Titus 2:11-14:

[In 1st tense] For the *grace of God* that brings *salvation* has appeared to *all men*,

[In 2nd tense - with that same grace then] teaching *us* [as believers] that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age,

[Regarding 3rd tense - while] looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,

[In 1st tense] who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people

[In 2nd tense] [who are] zealous for good works.

This passage emphasizes what God’s grace can do, yea must do, in all three tenses of salvation resulting in a people who are “zealous for good works.” Good works are a product of God’s grace in the life of the believer who is

learning to walk by faith in Christ.³

How Do You Walk in Christ?

Colossians 2:6-7 make it abundantly clear that a believer is to *walk* from day to day in the same manner that he *received* Jesus Christ – by God’s grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone as supreme and sufficient, apart from works, law, and rituals.

Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. (Colossians 2:6-7)

How did one *receive* Jesus Christ to become a child of God?

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name (John 1:12)

The word “walk” *in Him* is the very first command in the book of Colossians and it underscores for us the *how* of the Christian life, and the means of fulfilling all the instructions that follow in this epistle. Imagine someone asking you *how* to receive Jesus Christ to be saved, and you answer:

- *Do your best for Jesus.* But is that how you received Jesus Christ?
- *Confess your sins.* But is that what Acts 16:31 states?
- *Wake up and get to work.* What a contrast to Ephesians 2:8-9!

3. For an explanation of the place of good works in the Christian life and how they are the result of practical sanctification and a walk of faith, not a proof of justification before God, see Dennis M. Rokser, *Faith & Works: A Clarification of James 2:14-26* (Duluth, MN: Grace Gospel Press, 2014).

- *Obedience is the key.* Is that what John 3:16 states?
- *Practice the spiritual disciplines.* Romans 4:4-5 destroys that form of legalism.

You would be appalled to hear these answers for the *how* of justification, just as you should be appalled regarding the *how* of practical sanctification. Aren't these wrong answers *putting the cart before the horse* regarding spiritual fruitfulness and good works?

In keeping with the pattern at justification-salvation, God made the provision, we responded by faith in Christ, and God then did the saving. Think with me through Acts 16:31:

So they said, "Believe [aorist, active, imperative of *pisteuō*] on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved [future, passive, indicative]."

Our part is to choose (active voice) to believe (trust or rely on) the Lord Jesus Christ with the result that you will be saved. In other words, as a result of believing, you will be saved (future tense) by God (passive voice) and that's a fact that's guaranteed (indicative mood). The only response consistent with God's grace for salvation is to rely upon Jesus Christ to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves or merit by way of our religious works. If this is true for the 1st tense/phase of salvation, namely, justification, and we live the Christian life the very same way, then sanctification in the Christian life is obviously no different.⁴

Abide in Christ - the Key to Fruit Bearing

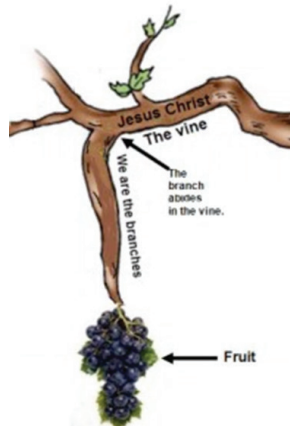
Our Lord made this clear to His believing disciples in the Upper Room Discourse when He emphatically declared:

4. Dennis M. Rokser, *I'm Saved! Now What? The Beginning and Basics of Christian Living by Grace* (Duluth, MN: Grace Gospel Press, 2013).

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. (John 15:4-5)

Do we believe what our Lord declared that “apart from Me, you can do nothing” by way of fruit bearing in the Christian life? Does this “fruit” come from self-effort and struggle, greater resolutions and commitments? Of course not. It is a wonderful day and an “aha” moment when we realize that God never asked us to produce fruit, but to bear it. We are no more capable of producing spiritual fruit than is a branch in a vineyard disconnected from the Vine. Only as we abide like a branch in active dependence upon the Vine (the Lord Jesus Christ) does the life of the Vine (the Holy Spirit) flow through the branch so as to produce this spiritual fruit to the glory of God. And for God to be glorified, He must accomplish it—for, in, or through us—as His human instruments, branches, or servants.

By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples. (John 15:8)



Understanding the Logical Flow of Romans

It is interesting to observe in Romans that Paul is passionate about preaching the Gospel (Rom. 1:14-17) and immediately establishes the *context* of the Gospel—a sinner’s guilt before a holy God. This is *the righteousness that God requires* that we do not have (1:18–3:20).

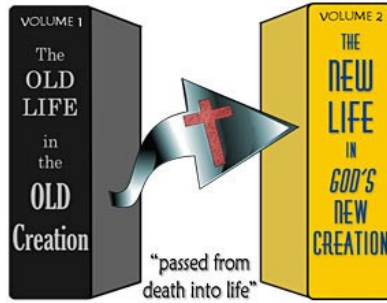
He then explains the *content* and *condition* of the Gospel and that justification (being declared righteous) before God is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ and His finished work alone apart from works, law, and ritual (Rom. 3:21–4:25). This is *the righteousness of God that is received* by faith alone as a gift.

He next underscores the believer’s *spiritual blessings and eternal security* by God’s grace and power, not his own faithfulness or holy living (Rom. 5:1-11). This is a critical truth that must be firmly grasped as children grow best in a secure home where they know that they are unconditionally loved and accepted.

These foundational truths are essential for proper spiritual growth. After setting the stage for identification truth by comparing and contrasting Adam and Christ in Romans 5:12-21, Paul cuts off the anticipated accusation of antinomianism or of grace being a license to sin (6:1) by explaining the believer’s *position / identification in Christ*—he has died to sin in being co-crucified, co-buried, and co-resurrected in Christ (6:2-5) to give him liberty now to “walk in newness of life” (6:4), not to continue to live in sin. He is no longer an “old man” as his history in Adam has ceased; he is a new creation in Christ and no longer under the ruling authority of the sin nature as we have been freed in Christ (6:6-7).

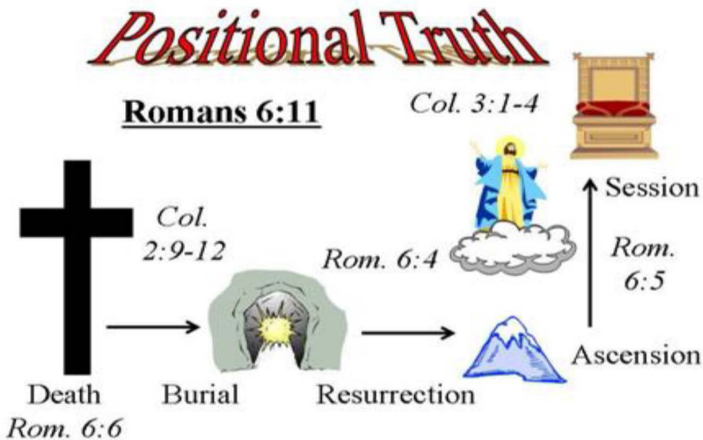
Only after this important positional plank in this doctrinal foundation is well laid in Romans 6:1-10 do we find in verse 11 the first imperative stated relative to the believer’s practical sanctification.

Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:11)



Keep the Order Clear: Know, Reckon, Present, Obey

“Reckon” (*logizomai*) is an accounting term used of arriving at a logical conclusion based upon calculating the facts. To fulfill this imperative, believers must know and choose (active voice) to simply “reckon” by faith what God states is already true of them “in Christ Jesus.” Paul has already established that every believer has died to the sin nature’s bondage and is now free and alive to God because of their position in Christ (6:1-5).



Believers in Christ also have been separated from the sin nature's past ruling authority over their lives because of their union with Jesus Christ and are now freed as new creations in Christ (6:6-7). Whether one believes them or not, these are the biblical *facts* and God wants every believer to "know" (6:3, 6, 10) and "believe" them (6:8). Yet, like the Gospel of grace, these great truths are of no personal value until they are personally known and believed. Thus, the fitting imperative to exercise a logical faith ("reckon" - 6:11) regarding the believer's positional freedom in Christ follows these indicatives (6:1-10).

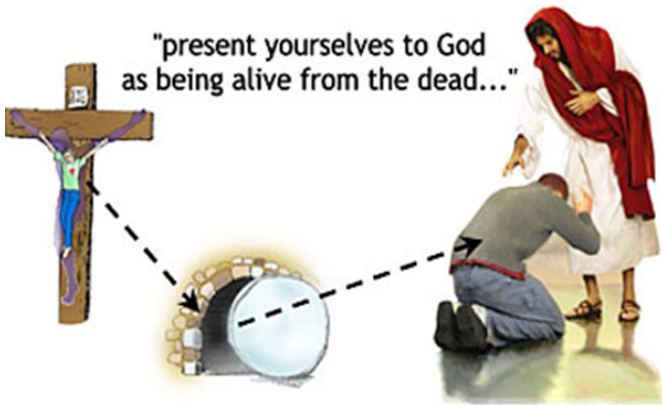
Appropriately, this command to exercise a logical faith ("reckon") sets the stage for three other logical imperatives in living the Christian life based on Romans 6:11. Thus, Romans 6:12-14 goes on to instruct believers to:

- (1) Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. (6:12)
- (2) And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, (6:13a)
- (3) but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. (6:13b)

For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace. (Romans 6:14)



While the Christian still retains a sin nature (6:12a) that desires to reign as a king practically in his life (6:12b), he now has a daily choice to either yield / present himself to the Lord or to the sin nature with significant godly or ungodly consequences that result (6:12-22). This presenting is not a one-shot dedication like some have misunderstood but involves moment-by-moment decisions to yield to the Lord in our daily walk of faith and fellowship with Jesus Christ.



It is interesting and important to note the progression of thought in Romans 6 and the place of practical obedience in the Christian life:

- (1) Know / believe the facts of your identification in Christ (6:3, 6, 8, 10);
- (2) Reckon by faith these facts to be true (6:11);
- (3) Present / yield yourself to the Lord to serve or obey Him (6:12, 13);
- (4) Obey / obedience will be the *result* of knowing, reckoning, and presenting (6:12, 16).

Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey,

whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. (Romans 6:16-22)

Dear reader, the simple truth being taught here is that because of our freedom in Christ *positionally*, we are practical slaves / servants *conditionally* to whom we choose to yield / present ourselves to serve each day—either Jesus Christ or the sin nature. What a great and encouraging discovery this is since the Christian life is relational, not mechanical or mystical. Unfortunately, many believers know little of the truths of Romans 6 and view the Christian life as a series of things you need to obey or do without these wonderful truths being grasped.

Romans 7 Self-Effort to Do God's Will and Defeat

However, the weakness of even a regenerated man to live the Christian life was also the realization that the apostle Paul experienced in Romans 7 when he sought to do God's will (due to a new nature) through sheer willpower and his own strength yet failed miserably.

For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. (Romans 7:15-18)

What will the believer experience when he seeks to live the Christian life by a legalistic mindset of focusing on self, obedience, and performance, seeking victory and fruit through his own strength? It will be the failure and frustration described in Romans 7!

O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? (Romans 7:24)

Can you relate? While knowing the truth of Romans 6, and desiring to serve Jesus Christ, how did Paul end up in Romans 7? He defaulted into self-dependence, instead of yielded dependence upon the Lord!

Endowed with Immense Will Power Yet Failing

C.I. Scofield wisely wrote years ago about Paul in Romans 7:

It is a very common mistake to suppose that we could be holy if we wanted to. We think our difficulty lies in bringing the will to act on the side of what God requires, and that if we only put forth sufficient will-power we should enter upon a spiritual life. But here is a man who makes the amazing discovery that the spiritual life is something above the reach of his will at its highest stretch. He cannot grasp spirituality and bring it down into his life by willing to do it. And this was the experience, let us remember, of one of the strongest wills that ever was lodged in a human char-

acter. The Apostle Paul was not a weakling; he was endowed with immense will power. (*New Life in Christ*, p. 18)

While he knew doctrinally that he had died to the Law (7:4) and was released from it (7:6), yet practically Paul was approaching the Christian life legalistically. In doing so, he focused on himself and his performance instead of abiding by faith in Jesus Christ as His resource for everything. He began living by law instead of by grace through faith in Christ. He relied on his sufficiency instead of the sufficiency of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. This will always be a recipe for failure or self-righteousness, as George MacDonald quipped in yesteryear, "We will fail miserably or succeed more miserably."

Active Dependence, Passive Production

Dear reader, the Christian life is lived God's way, by active dependence upon Jesus Christ through faith-resting in the grace provisions of God. God the Holy Spirit is the power-source of the Christian life – not you or me! This is why the Holy Spirit is mentioned only one time in Romans 7 in explaining powerless sanctification, though He is mentioned twenty-one times in Romans 8 in emphasizing powerful sanctification. Years ago, Harry Ironside penned:

In Romans Seven Paul is describing the inevitable conflict that every believer knows when he undertakes to lead a holy life on the principle of legality. He feels instinctively that the law is spiritual, but that he himself, for some unexplained reason, is fleshly, carnal, and in bondage to sin. This discovery is one of the most heart-breaking a Christian ever made. Yet each one must and does make it for himself at some time in his pilgrimage. The believer finds himself doing things he knows to be

wrong, and which his inmost desires are opposed to; while what he yearns to do he fails to accomplish, and does, instead, what he hates. But this is the first part of a great lesson which all must learn who would matriculate (enroll) in God's school. It is the lesson of no confidence in "the flesh"; and until it is learned there can be no true progress in growth. The incorrigibility of the flesh must be realized before one is ready to turn altogether from self to Christ for sanctification, as he has already done for justification.

The man in Romans Seven is occupied with himself, and his disappointment and anguish spring from his inability to find in self the good which he loves. The man of Romans Eight has learned there is no good to be found in self. It is only in Christ; and his song of triumph results from the joy of having found out that he is "complete in Him."

In answer to Paul's cry of despair in Romans 7:24 comes his exclamation of gratitude in verse 25 (italicized):

O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? *I thank God – through Jesus Christ our Lord!* So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

Permit me to quote C.I. Scofield once again:

When we pass from the seventh to the eighth of Romans, we find the wretched man of the seventh of Romans at peace and victorious. What is now his testimony? "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death." Not a new resolution, nor a new habit, nor a deeper hold on himself, nor more prayer. Do you think a man in the agony of the seventh of Romans does not pray? Why, the apostle Paul,

when he was there, prayed you can be sure, day and night on his face before God. Not more prayer, not more anything that you and I do, nor that Paul could do, but something that God can do. (*New Life in Christ*, p. 23)

Romans 8 Victory by the Power of the Holy Spirit

With Paul focused once again on Jesus Christ and not himself, he triumphantly declares in Romans 8:1-4:

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

It is important and imperative to note that *“the righteous requirement of the law [to be holy and to love God and others] is fulfilled in us [not by us], who walk not according to the flesh [like Paul in Romans 7] but according to the Spirit.”* This is how *the righteousness of God can be reproduced* in our lives supernaturally.

In his classic commentary *Romans Verse-by-Verse*, William R. Newell aptly writes:

When we begin to comprehend Romans Six, we know that our death in Christ unto sin was completed at Calvary. When we have been in Romans Seven for a time, we come to realize that we have been struggling to produce that which God has already accomplished for us in Christ. When we

thereby come to Romans Eight, we know at last that the Holy Spirit will produce in our experience what God completed for us on the Cross and in Christ our life. In Romans Six we see the foundation of our deliverance—the fact that we died with Christ; and also, the conditions of our deliverance—that we reckon ourselves dead unto sin and yield to God as those that are alive from the dead. Romans Eight tells us the means and the method of our deliverance—that it is through the blessed Holy Spirit alone that we are actually delivered in everyday life, from sin’s reign; the moment we cease from all our own efforts and let Him do all the work, He will begin delivering us from the power of sin. How long it takes some of us to come to the end of our own efforts can be seen in Romans Seven!⁵



Observe the Pattern of Imperatives in Romans

In clarifying a grace approach to Christian living, it is also helpful to observe Paul’s use of imperatives in Romans.

- **Romans 1-11:** 3:4; 6:11, 6:12, 6:13, 6:19; 7:7; 10:6; 11:9, 11:10, 11:18, 11:20, 11:22

5. For a detailed explanation of Romans 6–8, see my booklet, *I’m Saved but Struggling with Sin! Is Victory Available?* (Duluth, MN: Grace Gospel Press, 2016).

- **Romans 12-16:** 12:2 (2x), 12:14, 12:16, 12:19, 12:20, 12:21; 13:1, 13:3, 13:4, 13:7, 13:8, 13:9, 13:14; 14:1, 14:3, 14:5, 14:13, 14:15, 14:16, 14:20, 14:22; 15:2, 15:7, 15:10, 15:11; 16:3, 16:5, 16:6, 16:7, 16:8, 16:9, 16:10, 16:11, 16:12, 16:13, 16:14, 16:15, 16:16, 16:17

Some Bible teachers in their desire to hold fast to grace almost approach scriptural imperatives as if they were legalism or optional instead of appropriate biblical obedience that flows from a faith-rest walk enabled by the Holy Spirit. It is not until Paul has laid a strong grace foundation of what Christ has done, is doing, and will do for, in, and through us by His grace through faith regarding our justification (3:21-5:11), sanctification (5:12-8:17), and glorification (8:18-39) that he then bundles one imperative application after another starting in Romans 12.

The Hinge Verses of Romans 12:1-2

Observe that the hinge verses of moving from grace doctrine to grace application (12:1-2) involve a return to the previous foundation of Romans 1-8.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (Romans 12:1-2)

These two verses are crucial hinge verses of what has transpired earlier in Romans to what will now follow.

Romans 12:1

A. The APPEAL of Grace - "I beseech you"

B. The AUDIENCE of Grace - "brethren"

C. The APPROACH of Grace – “by the mercies of God”

D. The AIM of Grace – “that you present your bodies a living sacrifice”

What is the three-fold description of this sacrifice? It is:

- 1) “living” – this is contrasted to a dead sacrifice. (Rom. 6:13)
- 2) “holy” – this means to be set apart unto God and for His purposes. (1 Cor. 6:19-20)
- 3) “acceptable to God” – this means to be well-pleasing to God. (Rom. 4:18; 2 Cor. 5:9; Eph. 5:10; Phil. 4:18; Col. 3:20; Heb. 13:20-21)

What is the two-fold description of this act of sacrifice? It is:

- 1) “reasonable” – this means it is logical and reasonable in view of God’s mercies.
- 2) “service” – this refers to a spiritual act of worship and service.



Romans 12:1 is an appeal to *true spirituality by grace* based upon the mercies of God in light of the finished work of Christ, the believer's position in Christ, the enablement of the Holy Spirit, and the believer's guaranteed future glorification. Romans 12:2 immediately follows with some imperatives regarding the believer's *spiritual growth* by the renewing of one's mind in the Word of God.

Romans 12:2

The ELEMENTS of the APPEAL (12:1b-2b) – In light of the tremendous mercies of God toward you in past justification by grace, present sanctification by grace, and future glorification by grace (Romans 1–11):

- A. **PRESENT YOUR BODY TO GOD** as a living sacrifice – *“that you present your bodies... service.”*
- B. **DO NOT BE CONFORMED** to this WORLD – *“And do not be conformed to this world.”* This is a passive imperative verb, which reminds us that while we are responsible for its fulfillment (imperative mood) we are unable to produce the action (passive voice), but it is what we must let God accomplish in our life.
- C. **BE TRANSFORMED** – *“but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”* This is also a passive voice verb in the imperative mood, which indicates we are responsible in our volition or will to fulfill this but we are unable to produce the transformation, thus, requiring the Holy Spirit to accomplish this. But how does He do this? The means of this transformation process is underscored with the phrase, *“by the renewing of our minds”* in the Word of God from a grace perspective.

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed

into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord. (2 Corinthians 3:18)

The END in VIEW of the APPEAL (12:2c)

A. The DISCERNING and DOING of God's Will -
"that you may prove...the will of God."

B. The DESCRIPTION of God's Will - *"what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect..."*

Romans 12:1-2 seeks to stir up the believer's mind and emphasize afresh the wonderful truths of Romans 6-8 that he has been previously taught. The important truths of our positional identification with Christ, our practical reckoning by faith and yielding to the Lord, our powerless sanctification by law or human effort, and powerful sanctification by the Holy Spirit, should ever be the paradigm through which these practical imperatives are viewed and fulfilled. Otherwise, we will be ever prone to roll up our sleeves and seek to crank out obedience, only to find ourselves back in Romans 7 with its self-effort and defeat.

A Biblical Pattern for Teaching Grace

I am convinced that we would do well as Bible teachers to pattern our teaching after this grace approach of starting with foundational grace doctrine and moving to fitting grace practice, by explaining the person and work of Jesus Christ, our position, possessions, and privileges in Him, followed with practical imperatives relative to our walk and growth in Christ as set forth in:

- Romans (1-11; 12-16),
- Ephesians (1-3; 4-6),
- Colossians (1-2; 3-4), etc.

William R. Newell comments on the importance of sound doctrine and this grace approach:

Paul does not ask a thing of the saints in Ephesians 1-3 but just to listen while he proclaims that wonderful series of great and eternal facts concerning them: and not until he has completed this catalogue of heavenly realities about them does he ask them to do anything at all!

And when he does open his plea for their high walk as saints, everything is based upon the revelation before given of the truths of their high character and destiny as saints: I therefore ... beseech you that you walk worthy of the high calling to which you were called (Eph. 4:1).

Let us cease laying down to the saints long lists of "conditions" for entering into the blessed life of the Lord Jesus: and instead, as the primal preparation for leading them into the experience of this life, show them what their position, possessions, and privileges in Christ already are! Thus we shall truly work with the Holy Spirit: and thus shall we have more, and much more abiding fruit of our labors among the people of God.

Amen? This same pattern is found in Romans as after Romans 12:1-2 we observe thirty-eight imperatives that remind us specifically of God's will and that we are to be doers of the Word and not hearers only, deceiving our own selves" (James 1:22). But this is only possible as we abide in Christ as our Life and are empowered by the Holy Spirit to do so.

You See What You Are Looking For

It is amazing that after someone begins to have their eyes open to the grace approach for Christian living, they be-

gin to observe verses they quickly read over before or they begin to see them with so much more clarity. Sometimes they may even wrongly conclude, “Why haven’t I ever heard this before?” Now, it might be true that they have not heard Christian living by grace before as they were fed a steady diet of legalism served up in various forms. Or it could be that they had heard grace sanctification before but now it is finally clicking in their thinking. So often we see only what we are looking for and miss the obvious.

This reality reminds me of the young married couple who decided to go on vacation in North Carolina with their five-year-old son. Because they were outdoors enthusiasts, they wanted to rough it and go camping. When the sign “Naturist Camp” caught their eye, they decided to check it out further. As they drove down the frontage road that led to the camp, they were startled to see three adults, buck naked, riding their bicycles and coming directly their way. Realizing now that they had ventured upon a nudist colony, and unable to cover their son’s eyes in time, the three-some rode by and waved as they did. With their minds racing, these startled parents were wondering exactly how their son would react to what he had just seen. What a surprise when this young boy announced, “Mommy, daddy, did you see those three people? None of them had their bike safety helmets on.” You see what we are looking for.



A Serious Question to Ask Those You Teach

If we were to ask those whom we teach, “How exactly do you live the Christian life from day to day? As a believer in Christ, must you obey to be spiritual or be spiritual to obey?” How would they answer?

Will your hearers say in essence, “I cannot live the Christian life; it must be by faith in Jesus Christ empowered by the Holy Spirit in keeping with my new position in Christ”? Or would they answer a series of things that they need to do or not do, of course with God’s help. Why don’t you ask them and find out? What you assume may not actually be the reality you hear. To illustrate this problem and concern once again, listen to the following testimony and see if you can relate?

On another occasion I was in a Bible class taught by a friend who is a seminary professor. During the one-hour class he used the word obedience no fewer than thirty times. Afterwards over coffee I asked him where faith and the Holy Spirit were in his message? He told me what I believe many think to be true: that the congregation understood that our Christian obedience could only be from the power of the Holy Spirit. He did not, however, say that and I know many of the believers who hear about obedience do not know that either. They see their obedience as that which approves them to God apart from grace, apart from the cross, apart from faith, and apart from the Holy Spirit. Although they know they were saved by grace through faith they now think they must live by works of obedience. We have to ask what is communicated when we use the word *obedience* without prefacing it with God’s grace, our faith, and the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit.

The Trap of Legalism

Are we guilty of this assumption and potential “grace disconnect”? I will be quick to confess that I am a congenital legalist with a licentious bent due to still having a sin nature, along with human viewpoint remaining in my cranium. Thus, grace orientation is foreign to my natural thinking and highlights my need for Romans 12:1-2 daily. Therefore, I am ever prone to want to help God out by my own wisdom and strength (as if He needs me). In addition, “religion” and even too much Bible teaching in our day appeals to the flesh to try harder and give it your best. The glaring truth is that I actually need to depend upon Him as He is fully capable of doing His will for, in, and through me, by His grace, according to His revealed Word. Consider the following verses regarding this important scriptural truth and ponder how it is God that accomplished these realities in our lives.

Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. (Hebrews 13:20-21)

Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. (2 Corinthians 3:5-6)

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. (2 Corinthians 4:7)

Multiplication in Ministry - Only by Grace

You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. (2 Timothy 2:1-2)

I have often called this the “Pauline version of the Great Commission.” But before the Apostle Paul peppers Timothy, his son in the faith, with one imperative instruction after another, he makes sure to remind Timothy in verse 1 to:

“be strong” – a present tense, passive voice, imperative mood of the Greek word *endynamoō*.

It is critical to observe that this verb is in the *passive* voice, namely, it is not something you do but something you *receive* by way of inner strength. The idea is “be strengthened” as the ESV translates it, not “be strong,” as if the Christian life depended upon you. Following passive verbs oftentimes are a *preposition of means* to explain how the stated result will occur. In this case, inner strength is received by us by means of the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Paul states this up front (2:1) before proceeding with the other twelve imperatives found in this chapter as we could never accomplish any of this in our own strength, nor does God want us to do so. If we could live the Christian life without the inner strength that comes to us from abiding in Christ, we would not need Him in fulfilling the Christian life, underscoring once again the life of grace and faith.

The Faith-Rest Life

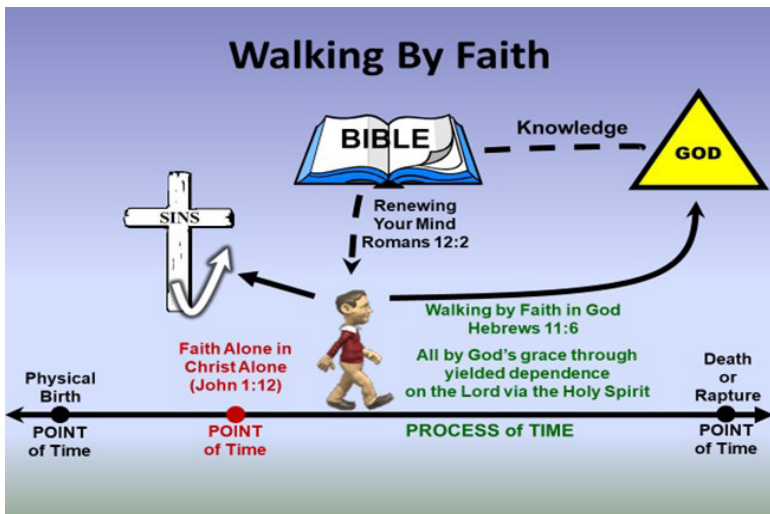
This walk of faith in Jesus Christ I oftentimes call the “faith-rest life” as rooted in Hebrews 3 and 4 (the word “rest” or “rested” occurs 12 times in these chapters). Just like when I rested by faith in the finished work of Christ for my justification before God, so I am to rest by faith in

God's person, promises, and provisions of grace in my daily walk and sanctification (Heb. 4:1-10). However, entering and enjoying this faith-rest life daily will require "diligence" (Heb. 4:11, NKJV) in repeated choices to trust the Lord and not the arm of flesh (Jer. 17:5-8; Heb. 11:6). Yet, what a peace, joy, hope, and inner strength comes from faith-resting in the Lord:

- To fight my spiritual battles (2 Chron. 15, 17);
- To carry my burdens (1 Peter 5:7);
- To address my fears (Isa. 41:10);
- To direct my path (Prov. 3:5-6);
- To strengthen my service (Col. 1:29);
- To have victory over sin (Rom. 6:11-13);
- To build my marriage (Psalm 127:1).

Thus, Paul, in his prayer wish for the Roman believers, concludes this section with:

Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Romans 15:13)



The Object of Your Faith

Romans 15:13 is the Christian life in a nutshell based on grace doctrine. But keep in mind that the *value* of your faith (whether reliable or not), and *size* of your faith, lies in the *object* of faith. Was this not true with your salvation from Hell? Before I was saved, I had faith *but* in the wrong objects – Jesus Christ *plus* my church, my rituals, my good works, etc. Since a chain is as strong as its weakest link, and my efforts were part of the links, this chain could never accomplish for me what I had hoped, namely, to save me from a Hell I deserve to a Heaven that I don't. But when I was justified by God's grace and redeemed by Christ's blood, I finally understood that "it is finished" (John 19:30) as my sins were "paid in full" and that salvation was a gift for the guilty not a reward for the righteous. It was at that time that I placed in my faith in Christ *period* – the only object of faith that could save me and the only Savior God ever provided. No wonder the Gospel of grace is that Jesus Christ (God who became a man) died for our sins and rose again to saves us by God's grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone (1 Cor. 15:1-11). And since the value of one's faith lies in its object, and my object was not Christ alone, I could then rejoice in what the old hymn of the faith so accurately proclaims:

My faith has found a resting place, not in device,
nor creed.

I trust that ever living One His wounds for me
shall plead.

I need no other argument; I need no other plea.

It is enough that Jesus died, and that He died for me.

It is crucial to understand that the same truth transfers over to the Christian life, namely, the *value* of your faith lies in your *object* of faith. Because of this, a grow-

ing knowledge of our Lord Jesus and the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16) via the Word of God is very important for proper spiritual growth.⁶

As it relates to the *size* of your faith, the difference between “little faith” (Matt. 6:30; 8:26) and “great faith” (Matt. 8:10) is the size of *your God* in your mind’s eye.

Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, *O you of little faith?* (Matthew 6:30)

But He said to them, “Why are you fearful, *O you of little faith?*” Then He arose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. (Matthew 8:26)

The centurion answered and said, “Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to this one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes; and to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.” When Jesus heard it, He marveled, and said to those who followed, “Assuredly, I say to you, *I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!*” (Matthew 8:8-10)

It should not therefore surprise us that those who have been born again by God’s grace are then instructed to become diligent students of the Scriptures.

Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. (2 Timothy 2:15, KJV)

6. For more explanation of growing by God’s grace, see my booklet *How Do You Grow Spiritually? Growing in Grace in Your Christian Life* (Duluth, MN: Grace Gospel Press, 2015). Free pdf copies are available at: gracegospelpress.org/free-downloads/

Law vs. Grace – Focus & Faith

The Christian life boils down to *focus* and *faith* (Gal. 2:20; Heb. 12:2; 2 Peter 3:18). Therefore, a growing knowledge of our Lord Jesus and God's grace is crucial for inner spiritual transformation and not mere external legal conformity (2 Cor. 3:18). This is also why a dispensational understanding of the Word of God is critical lest we mix Israel's Law, with its earthly physical promises and blessings, and its "obey and you will be blessed" Old Testament approach with the New Testament teachings of grace (Rom. 6:14) for the Church (Eph. 2 and 3) and its spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ (Eph. 1:3). Once again, permit me to quote William R. Newell when he wrote in *Romans Verse-by-Verse* (pp. 246-47):

The Proper Attitude of Man Under Grace:

To believe, and to consent to be *loved while unworthy*, is the great secret.

To refuse to make "resolutions" and "vows"; for that is to trust in the flesh.

To expect to be blessed, though realizing more and more lack of worth...

To rely on God's chastening [child training] hand as a mark of His kindness...

Things Which Gracious Souls Discover:

To "hope to be better" [hence acceptable] is to fail to see yourself *in Christ only*.

To be *disappointed* with yourself, is to have *believed* in yourself.

To be *discouraged* is *unbelief*, – as to God's purpose and plan of blessing for you.

To be *proud*, is to be *blind!* For we have no standing before God, in *ourselves*.

The lack of Divine blessing, therefore, comes from *unbelief*, and not from *failure of devotion*...

To preach devotion first, and blessing second, is to reverse God's order, and preach *law, not grace*. The Law made man's blessing depend on devotion; Grace *confers undeserved, unconditional* blessing: our devotion may follow, but does not always do so, – in proper measure.

A Composite Definition of the Christian Life by Grace

Over the years, I have sought to crystalize in writing the essence of Christian living by grace. While the following definition of the Christian life is incomplete in certain details, I have sought to capture its essence by writing:

The authentic, Christian life is designed to be a daily, personal, vertical, fellowship with God (1 John 1:3-10; John 17:3; Phil. 3:10) based on our identification with Jesus Christ (Rom. 6:1-10; Col. 2:20-3:4), motivated primarily by His love (2 Cor. 5:14-15), and provided totally by His grace (1 Cor. 15:10) and power (Rom. 8:1-4), as we have been blessed with all spiritual blessings (Eph. 1:3) and are complete in Christ (Col. 2:10), which is enjoyed through repeated responses of faith as one diligently seeks the Lord (Heb. 4:9-11; 11:6; 2 Cor. 5:8), resulting in spiritual growth (1 Peter 2:2) and Christlikeness (2 Cor. 3:18), faithful obedience to God's will (Rom. 6:16; 12:2) and fruitful service to others in love (Gal. 5:13; 1 Peter 4:10) ultimately all to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:32; 1 Peter 5:11).

I understand this is a mouthful and even then, I am sure it is incomplete. But note that the Christian life is not mechanical or mystical, but it is relational (a daily, personal fellowship with God). Also observe its grace approach – not “obey to be blessed” but “you are blessed in Christ, thus, respond by faith.” In addition, it is critical to distinguish the means from the results.

The Free Grace Faux Pas

It is in the area of sanctification where a Free Grace faux pas too often occurs. The thesaurus says a *faux pas* is “an error, a blooper, a bungle, a boo boo, a lapse, a slip.” Let me illustrate this faux pas once again from one Free Grace proponent:

The condition for our justification is faith alone in Christ but there are *many conditions* for sanctification. If we confuse the two then we wrongly conclude that the *conditions* for sanctification such as obedience, commitment, submission, good works, are conditions for justification. But since we know that justification is by grace through faith, the Bible’s commands for obedience, commitment, submission and good works are *conditions* only for our sanctification. If these were conditions for our justification then salvation would be by works instead of faith.

This Free Grace proponent commits the same error in second tense salvation that LS does in first tense. They put all these conditions upon it instead of it being by God’s grace through simple faith in Jesus Christ and His sufficiency. To follow his line of reasoning, *if these were conditions for our justification then salvation would be by works instead of faith*, one would have to conclude that salvation in its 2nd tense, namely, practical sanctification, would be by works and not by faith. This fails the grace of God. It is critical to note that he confuses the *means* with the *results*. Although he relegates these results to sanctification instead of justification, this is still a serious faux pas. This is actually part of the Galatian error!

Legalism in 1st and 2nd Tense / Phase of Salvation

The inward tendency and religious teaching of legalism always stands as a challenge to the teaching of grace. By legalism I mean the mental attitude which seeks to earn or merit the blessings of God by religious rituals or good works for either justification or sanctification. We observe in Galatians Paul's hard-hitting anathema of adding even one work to the message of grace (1:3-11) and how the Law can neither justify the sinner nor sanctify the saint through obedience and self-effort.⁷ Therefore, Paul makes it crystal clear *how* a sinner is *justified*.

knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified. (Galatians 2:16)

How does the believer then live the Christian life in *sanctification*? In the same manner and by the same means as he was justified.

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. (Galatians 2:20)

Why must justification and sanctification be solely by God's grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone based upon the finished work of Jesus Christ?

I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain. (Galatians 2:21)

7. For a grace-oriented exposition on justification and sanctification by grace from Galatians, see C.I. Scofield, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Duluth, MN: Grace Gospel Press, 2014).

What happens when we lose sight of our walk and growth by grace through faith and resort to an obedience, works based approach to the Christian life? We lose *focus* (Jesus Christ and Calvary) and our object of *faith* then shifts from Jesus Christ to self in a legalistic approach to Christian living. Isn't that what happened to the saints of Galatia?

O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes *Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified*? This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? *Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit* [through simply believing the Gospel], *are you now being made perfect by the flesh* [a works-obedience approach to sanctification]? Have you suffered so many things in vain – if indeed it was in vain? Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, does He do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? [Of course, the hearing of faith] (Galatians 3:1-5)

Once again, I would state emphatically that the Christian life is lived by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone just as we were justified before God and saved from sin's penalty. Obedience to God's will results and overflows out of this daily walk of faith as empowered by the Holy Spirit instead of cranking it out by the flesh. No wonder Paul called these believers, "O foolish Galatians!" Would he say the same of us in our teaching and living? Have we jumped from Romans 3-5 to Romans 12:1-2 and skipped right over Romans 6-8?

Neither in doctrine nor in walk did the Reformation go back to the early days of the Church. In doctrine they did teach (thank God!) justification by faith apart from works. Luther's "Commentary on Galatians" is in many respects the most

vigorous utterance of faith since Paul. Yet the Reformers did not teach Paul's doctrine of identification, — that the believer's history, as connected with Adam, ended at Calvary: that he died to sin, federally, with Christ; and died to the law, which gave sin its power. All the Reformation creeds kept the believer under the law as a rule of life; and "the law made nothing perfect," whereas, Scripture speaks of a perfect conscience, through a perfect sacrifice; of faith being perfected; of being made perfect in love; of perfecting holiness in the fear of God. (William R. Newell, *Revelation Chapter-by-Chapter*, p. 63)

Back to the Beginning with Clarification

We began this booklet by considering some statements that reflect a Free Grace faux pas. Let's close by briefly examining what is problematic about each of these explanations of how you live the Christian life.

- *While justification is by grace through faith alone, sanctification is by faith plus works.* What is problematic is "sanctification is by faith plus works." While we would reject this answer for one's justification before God, we should do the same regarding practical sanctification based upon Colossians 2:6-7, Galatians 2:20, and other verses. It would be better to state: while justification is by grace through faith alone in Christ alone, sanctification is also by faith in Christ resulting in good works empowered by the Holy Spirit.
- *As believers in Jesus Christ, we must do our best for Jesus if we are going to receive a reward.* We are not justified by doing our best for Jesus, nor are we sanctified by doing our best for Jesus. Instead, we should walk by faith and allow the Holy Spirit to produce His best through us as we do what we do heartily as unto the Lord which

then results in a reward. "And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ" (Col. 3:23-24).

- *The key to the Spirit-filled life is the confession of our sins (1 John 1:9).* The problem with this phrase is the word "key." The confession of the believer's sins as needed to be restored to fellowship with God is a trans-dispensational principle (Prov. 28:13; 1 John 1:9). In his first epistle, the apostle John is upfront in this book as to its theme and purpose:

that which we have seen and heard [Jesus Christ] we declare to you, that you also may have *fellowship* with us; and truly our *fellowship* is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that your joy may be full. (1 John 1:3-4)

Unlike the LS crowd (and others) that wrongly conclude 1 John involves a series of tests to determine whether you are really saved, John makes it abundantly clear that he is writing to believers regarding their daily walk with Jesus Christ and the importance of having fellowship with Him.

If *we* [believers] say that we [believers] have *fellowship with Him*, and [at the same time] *walk in darkness*, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we [as believers] *walk in the light* as He is in the light, we [believers] *have fellowship with one another*, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us [believers] from all sin. (1 John 1:6-7)

Would you ever talk to unbelievers about walking in the light when they are not even in the light but remain in the darkness of unbelief without Christ? Do unbelievers not need to hear the Gospel? But how ap-

appropriate for those who have been born again into the family of God now to receive scriptural instruction regarding how to have daily fellowship with their Father and His Son. Later the Apostle John writes:

9 If we [believers] confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us [believers] our sins and to cleanse us [believers] from all unrighteousness. 10 If we [believers] say we have not sinned, we [believers] make Him a liar, and His word is not in us [as believers]. (1 John 1:9-10)

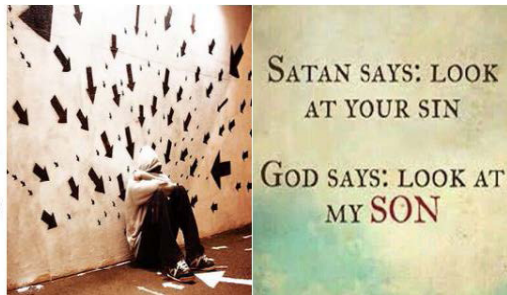
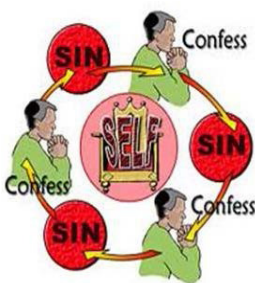
When believers are made aware of committing sins in their walk (1:6, 7), they are to confess them honestly to God as needed (v. 9), and not cover them by blaming others, living in denial, etc. (v. 10). They can then claim His parental forgiveness and cleansing in their walk by exercising faith in His stated promises (v. 9; see also John 13:10). The purpose of this confession of sins is to again “walk in the light as He is in the light” and “have fellowship with one another” (v. 7) as v. 7 precedes v. 9. This confession is neither mechanical (“just name that sin”) nor mystical, but relational, as fellowship with God should be the believer’s daily enjoyment. But while this passage is an important section dealing with fellowship with God, in the book of 1 John confession of sins is not emphasized again as the *key* to spirituality, though it has its proper place.⁸

In addition, if confession of sins is the *key* to the Spirit-filled life, why is it totally missing from Romans 6–8, the most extensive section in the New Testament regarding the believer’s sanctification?

8. For further observations on the purpose of this epistle being fellowship versus the position of eternal life, see Dennis M. Rokser, *How to Interpret 1 John* (Duluth, MN: Grace Gospel Press, 2015).



While not throwing out the baby with the bathwater as some have done in Free Grace circles regarding the need at all of confession of sins, I recognize that the *key* to the Christian life is not the confession of sins but walking by faith in the light of Jesus Christ. However, I would encourage us neither to eliminate, nor overemphasize, the use of 1 John 1:9, as some teachers do, since the number of scriptural exhortations to confess our sins pales in comparison and emphasis to living by faith in the sanctification process. And unless we move on from the 1 John 1:9 treadmill (sin-confess-sin-confess) to understand the faith-rest life and our victory in Christ enabled by the Holy Spirit, we will focus on self and sin, instead of Jesus Christ, and soon tire of trying to live the Christian life. The problem is trying to wring out of 1 John 1:9 more than God intended it to do.



- *Believers, you just need to wake up and get to work.* The problem with this statement is that it is totally unscriptural and runs contrary to grace in justification and sanctification. Ironically, I heard this phrase connected with some comments regarding the Church of Laodicea (Rev. 3:14-22) where Jesus Christ never tells this church to wake up and get to work. Instead, our Lord rebukes them for their lukewarmness and instructs them, “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent” (Rev. 3:19). Jesus Christ then invites individual believers to accept His invitation of fellowship, not “wake up and get to work.” “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me” (Rev. 3:20). Instead of the need to *wake up and get to work*, actually vertical fellowship with the Lord is primary and the very means by which godly works will then result. This Free Grace faux pas once again puts the cart before the horse.
- *Obedience is the key to true spirituality.* With all the commands and imperatives given to the Church, how could anyone rightly deny or discount the importance of obedience in the Christian life? The issue then revolves around *how* obedience occurs and its *proper place* in the Christian life. I would draw your attention back to Romans 6 where we observed the order: know/believe; reckon by faith; present by faith yourself and members; resulting in obedience. Romans 6:16 makes it clear that you will obey practically whom you present yourself to – whether to the sin nature or the Lord. I also remind you of Paul’s Romans 7 defeat when obedience is attempted by self-effort instead of the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8). Once again, let’s not confuse the means with the results.

- *If you are going to spiritually grow, you need to faithfully perform the spiritual disciplines.* I fear that this is just another form of legalism with the key word being *do* with the formula of the Law: *do and you will be blessed.* Under grace, our Lord Jesus clarified the place of the Word of God and prayer while abiding in Christ when He spoke, “If you *abide in Me*, and *My words abide in you*, you will *ask* what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples” (John 15:7-8). As was previously observed in Romans 12:1-2, the daily presenting of ourselves is stated first followed by the need to be renewing our minds in the Word of God (1 Peter 2:2; 2 Cor. 3:18), in order for spiritual transformation to occur and the will of God be discerned and done.
- *Witnessing, reading your Bible and prayer is what makes you a truly spiritual Christian.* Ironically, all of these activities can be done by an unbeliever who has no hope to be a *spiritual Christian* until he is born again and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. In addition, anything the flesh can do is not the Christian life, and by nature “all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags” (Isa. 64:6). The spiritual Christian is the believer who is indwelt (Rom. 8:9) and filled with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18) so as to utilize the Word of God (Col. 3:16) to arrive at scriptural conclusions having the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:15-16). Remember the order of Romans 12:1-2.
- *When it comes to the Christian life, you need to do your best and then trust God to do the rest.* While it is true that God always must make up the difference (*then trust God to do the rest*), it is also true that we are “weakness incarnate” and must reject the concept of *doing our best* in exchange for relying on His sufficiency to make us able to do His will (Heb. 13:20-21). Actually, we need to trust God in and for our part as well as

to make up the difference regarding the rest that we have failed to do.

- *While justification is God's work, sanctification and spiritual growth is man's work.* This FG faux pas again is simply another form of legalism and misses the truths of God's grace, for both justification and sanctification are God's work. Justification is God's work *for* us (Rom. 3:24-25), while practical sanctification is God's work *in* us (Rom. 8:3-4), and service is God's work *through* us (Col. 1:28-29). It is true that God makes it clear to Church Age believers (like in the past) "but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, 'Be holy, for I am holy'" (1 Peter 1:15-16). The phrase "be [*ginomai*] holy [*hagios*]" (1:15) literally means "to be or become something you are not" naturally; that is, "holy." In addition, this phrase is a command that is grammatically *passive* in the Greek text, which reminds us once again that while we are responsible to see this fulfilled and have a choice in this important matter, *we* do not make ourselves holy but must allow *God* to make us holy in all our conduct.

We observe this same truth when it relates to our spiritual growth. First Peter 2:2 states: "as newborn babes, desire [aorist, active, imperative of *epipotheō*] the pure milk of the word, that you may grow [aorist, passive, subjunctive of *auxanō*] thereby." Believers are commanded (imperative mood) and responsible to desire by choice (active voice) the milk of the Word, while God produces the spiritual growth they receive (passive voice). Once again we see that spiritual growth is God's work with our volitional cooperation as the Christian life involves active dependence and passive production.

- *Your faithfulness and good works for Jesus Christ now will determine whether you receive a reward at the Judgment Seat of Christ or punitive damages involving outer dark-*

ness with wailing and gnashing of teeth. The problem with this statement is the latter half of it: *or punitive damages involving outer darkness with wailing and gnashing of teeth*. It is biblical that believers in Christ will give an account (2 Cor. 5:9-10) of how they lived their Christian lives during the sanctification phase to determine whether they will receive a reward or not in the glorification phase of their eternal salvation (1 Cor. 3:11-15). Did they live faithfully for the glory of God or the glory of man (1 Cor. 4:1-5)? Did they conduct themselves through the efforts of the flesh or the power of the Spirit (Rom. 7 and 8)? Did they live according to the wisdom of the Word of God or according to human wisdom (1 Cor. 3:11-15)? However, this FG faux pas confuses divine discipline versus punishment.

Jesus Christ was already punished for our sins, and God has been propitiated or satisfied by the complete payment that His Son has made for our sins (Rom. 3:25; 1 John 2:2; 4:10). Thus, for us to be punished would require a double punishment for sin – one by Christ *for us* in justification, and another one *by us* in glorification. God need not be satisfied with the just punishment of our sins twice, for “this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God” (Heb. 10:12).

God's Punishment	God's Discipline
Executing His justice	Executed in love
Upon unbelievers	Upon believers
Due to their rejection of Christ	Due to their need for correction
Not for their good	For their good
Involving God's wrath	Involving God's love
Resulting in condemnation	Resulting in chastening
Ultimately done after death	Only done in this lifetime

In addition, the doctrinal problems with this view are myriad.⁹ But also, this erroneous view of the Judgment Seat of Christ contextually misidentifies unbelievers as unfaithful believers, along with misinterpreting Kingdom passages in the Gospels and erroneously applies them to Church Age believers under grace.

- *Believers should also be motivated by the knowledge that their heavenly Father both blesses obedience and disciplines disobedience in His children (Heb 12:3-11; Lev 26:1-45).* While it is true that God does discipline His children in love when they persist in disobedience as a mark of sonship and to partake of His holiness practically (Heb. 12:5-11), this statement smacks of Law-orientation, and not grace. In addition to the Hebrews passage, Leviticus 26 is pure law for Israel and its usage fails to “rightly divide the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). Ironically, though this FG faux pas statement came from a FG proponent, I heard John MacArthur use the same reasoning to promote Lordship Salvation. In this dispensation of grace, blessings are not earned from God based on performance. Grace allows the believer to appropriate the blessing that is already his in Christ as he applies the truths of God’s Word in his walk of faith in Christ. The yielded believer is merely a vessel God uses as a means to minister for Him. James makes it clear that the believer in Christ is not blessed *for* his application of God’s Word but *in* it, as he enjoys the fruit of the Spirit through faith (James 2:21-25).

9. See chapter 3, “Examining the Doctrinal Problems” in *Should Christians Fear Outer Darkness?* by Dennis M. Rokser, Thomas L. Stegall, and Kurt Witzig (Duluth, MN: Grace Gospel Press, 2015), 25-59.

Two Voices from the Past

In his book, *He That Is Spiritual*, Lewis Sperry Chafer articulates well:

Normally, the spiritual Christian will be occupied with effective service for his Lord. This is not a rule. We need only to know that we are yielded and ready to do whatever He may choose. To “rest in the Lord” is one of the essential victories in a spiritual life. “Come ye apart and rest awhile.” We are just as spiritual when resting, playing, sleeping or incapacitated, if it is His will for us, as we are when serving. The spiritual life is not passive. Too often it is thus misjudged because of the fact that one, to be spiritual, must cease from self-effort in the direction of spiritual attainments and learn to live and serve by the power God has provided. True spirituality knows little of “quietism.” It is life more active, enlarged and vital because it is energized by the limitless power of God. Spirit-filled Christians are quite apt to be physically exhausted at the close of the day. They are weary *in* the work, but not weary *of* the work. (*He That Is Spiritual*, p. 140.)

Did you catch that? “Weary *in* the work, not *of* the work.” That’s Paul in Colossians 1:28-29!

In addition, J.F. Strombeck clearly states:

The admonition, “yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God” (Rom. 6:13), shows that the power is of God and not of man, for the instrument is powerless apart from the master’s control. This makes it important to distinguish between trying to serve God and being used of God. It should also be recog-

nized that God does not desire to *help* believers do things for Him; He desires to do the work Himself through them. Because grace is that which God and He alone does, the true life under grace has all its sources in Him. It follows then that whenever there is failure in the life of a saved person, it is due to dependence upon self instead of God. This does not relieve the believer of responsibility for his life, but that responsibility is to yield to the control of God. While salvation is of God, it is through Jesus Christ; so also godly living which is of God is through Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "Without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5).

(Disciplined by Grace in The Strombeck Collection: The Collected Works of J. F. Strombeck [Duluth, MN: Grace Gospel Press, 2013], p. 396).

Amen J.F.!

Two Phrases Worth Remembering

It is always helpful when you can reduce a principle to its bare minimum and state it in an unforgettable way. Years ago, I heard an adage that capsulized important Christian life truth that I thought was worth remembering. It was simply:

I try, I fail; I trust, He succeeds.

In addition, over the years I have taught the following statement that has resonated with many as well:

I cannot live the Christian life; it must be by faith in Jesus Christ enabled by the Holy Spirit.

Do you agree?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Dennis M. Rokser (M.Div., D.Min., Grace Biblical Seminary) pastored Duluth Bible Church from 1985-2022. The focus of his teaching has been the Gospel of God's grace as it relates to sal-vation, eternal security, the believer's identification/position in Christ, and living by grace through faith-resting in Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit.

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. (2 Timothy 4:2-4)