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The Pearl of Salvation
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Welcome to
Bible Study 101



Lord, thank you for Your Gift of understanding

Introduction

This study began as my own way to acknowledge and understand what God has done in my life. Simply put He has shown me Grace. The truth I have found through this study may it be, a constant reminder, so that I would never forget lessons learned. May I give what I have received, may I be a Grace- giver to those I met along the way. Much of what is written describes my own journey. I hope that you may find truth enough for you.



Then I was six years old I remember cheating on a Sunday school art contest (confession is good for the soul) and I won a trip to youth camp that summer. I traced a picture that was in my Bible that showed Christ praying on a rock in the Garden of Gethsemane and claimed I drew it. In my own defense I admit I did not know the difference between tracing and drawing at age six.

It was at this camp, in Big Bear Lake in the mountains of Southern California that I accepted Christ as my savior. It was at that moment, without knowing any scripture or the promises of God, I suddenly became the recipient of God's wonderful Grace. He started to fulfill a promise that I did not even know about, "To never leave me or forsake me." I am just now, over sixty-four years later, realizing that my life has been a journey of understanding the depths of what God has done for me and what it means. God's grace grabbed hold of me back then and has never let me go.

Over the years I discovered how long God's arms were and how longsuffering He is. I know now through my own experiences why Christ had to die and why I needed His Grace. Although I have been experiencing God's grace throughout my life, I must admit that like most Christians I have not always understood it.

Through my own study I can say that God has started a new work in me, to change me, to change my heart and my desire. He has opened my eyes, even if just a little, and allowed me some understanding of what grace is and I am truly

humbled by it. I am unqualified to teach anyone of His grace except that I have experienced it firsthand. I realize it is grace that justifies me in the eyes of God when my own sin condemns me.

For me this study is a beginning look into the depths of God's love, far beyond that which I had ever known. Over time it has changed my life. This study then is ...

For those who are learning the meaning of Grace and being changed by it.

This which we call grace can make a difference in your life. One of the crowning jewels of my understanding was my realization that it has the power to **SET ME FREE**. We all want freedom. We want to be set free from the inner things that burden us down. The guilt of the past, of decisions made selfishly, of sins committed and families torn apart, decisions made in secret that lie heavy on our hearts. All of these things together make up our shame. They are heavy burdens to carry and if not dealt with they will in time cause physical anxiety, panic and fear.

Listen to the words Jesus has for you:

Mt.11:28-30, "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Ref. Ps.55:22; Heb.13:5; II Cor. 4:8-9; I Pet.5:7)

If you will lay your burdens down and give them to Jesus then He will give you His burden, He promises it is lite and easy to carry. His goal is to give you rest from the cares and the worries of this world and in that you will find a type of freedom that gives you peace.

Though times are tough, God's love is tougher; in times of sickness, remember He is the healer. When money is in short supply, remember your Father owns cattle on a thousand hills and He will make a way. Is there any problem your Father cannot overcome? Then rejoice in Him and thank Him for His grace...it endures forever.

Yoke Destroying ... Burden Lifting

Amazing Grace

ecember 24, 1970 about 11pm, I was having my first Christmas in Vietnam. As I lay in my bunk, hands behind my head, I wondered what everyone back home was doing and what I would be doing if I was there. It was quiet throughout the barracks as the same feelings seemed to sweep over everyone that night. Then from the barracks next to us someone put on the song "Amazing Grace" by Judy Collins and turned up the volume so everyone could hear. Judy Collins may have been singing the song, but God was in the message. As the words rang out through the entire company, many hearts were touched by its message. I would venture to say there were not many dry eyes that night and especially mine.

As I lay on my bunk listening to the words, I seemed to connect with God and knew He understood the feelings in my heart. Even though I felt alone, I did feel the presence of God with me that night. He reaffirmed His love for me in the words of an old gospel hymn, "Amazing Grace."

As I looked back over the years of my life, I can see that Grace has been so much a part of each day. From the time I was six years old and accepted Christ as my Savior until now, it has always been God's grace that has brought me through. Like the words in the song, what I realized the same thing that night in Vietnam, that "Through many dangers, toils and snares, I have already come; Tis grace has brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home." I wanted to share this great song with you. May God bless you, as He did me, with the message of its words.



Amazing grace! How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me!

I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved; How precious did that grace appear, the hour I first believed!

Through many dangers, toils and snares,
I have already come;
'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far,
and grace will lead me home.

When we've been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun,

we've no less days to sing God's praise than when we first begun.

The Gift of God we call



To All of Those Whom Jesus Loves

To those who have held my hand along the way I want to say thank you. May God richly bless you in this life and the next.



Level 1.0

Lessons from the Book

(The Newbie Class)

ongratulations on making it this far, it is for all practical purposes your first day in the "Newbie class." The first thing you need to do is understand that you're not here by chance, or accident. Your attendance here was seen by God before the foundations of the world were laid. From this point forward all you have to do is to **BELIEVE.** Have faith in God, faith for the moment and faith for all the tomorrows yet to come, for without faith it is impossible to please God.

THE DEPTH OF GOD'S LOVE

God has a plan for you

Psalm 139:13-14 "For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well."

Isaiah 44:24, Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, who formed you from the womb: "I am the LORD, who made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by myself,

There was a time in the Kingdom of Heaven, long before Genesis 1:1, a time before time, in the dateless past. God had a plan for the eternal ages to come, so He went into the future and saw every day of it and all that He would create. He saw the beginning from the end and declared it was good.



Isaiah 46:10 (KJV), "Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things that are not yet done, Saying, 'My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure,"

He saw every person and yes He saw you and all the days of your life. God saw every good or bad thing you and every individual who would ever be born would do. God saw our choices as individuals and collectively as nations, who would choose Him and who would not. All these things were written down as a permanent record in the books of heaven long before the first man and woman were created.

You might be asking yourself that if humanity is so bad then why did He create us in the first place? ... I thought you would never ask.

The answer to your question is actually pretty simple, you have heard it a thousand times over and it's wrapped up in the greatest truth you will ever hear and may you never forget it. He gave us life and made a kingdom for our eternal happiness, all because **HE LOVED US** from the very beginning. His love for us was greater than the sin He saw in us. So a plan was made, an eternal plan with eternal truth hidden in the first word of scripture, so that whoever would seek truth would find the plan and know the handy work of the Lord.

Great Truth number One ... His love for us is greater than our sin.

That single word that was the first to be written was made up of six Hebrew letters beginning with *Bet*, then *Resh Aleph Shin Yod* and the *Tav*. These six letters spells the Hebrew word "**BERESHEET**" meaning "in the beginning," and is where we get the word Genesis from, however a more accurate meaning would be "in the dateless past."

It was at this time, in the Beresheet of time that a plan was born. You might call it a contract, or a covenant, it would be between God and you. It first came by way of the Law that was given through Moses, but through the work of Jesus upon the cross came the better sacrifice. Jesus amended the Law for those who would believe and we call it **GRACE.**



John 3:16 KJV, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

You will be seeing a lot of this scripture in the study.

There is a plan for you. You are precious in His sight and uniquely made. Remember this great truth, that Satan seeks to steal from you, the understanding that "where sin abounds, grace does much more abound." You cannot out sin God's love for you.

Great Truth number Two ... God's love is greater than your sin.

GOD MAKES A WAY

Fellowship restored

My reason for this section is to show you that from the beginning God has made a way for man to be restored back to Him. It started in the Garden, was the reason for the building of the Tabernacle, and the ultimate reason for Jesus coming into the world.

- ♣ ONE DAY IN THE GARDEN: We all know the story of Adam and Eve and how they disobeyed God by eating the fruit of the tree of "The Knowledge of Good and Evil" which they eventually did. In chapter 3:14-19 God declares the punishment on all three of them for their part in the sin. The part I wanted to call your attention to was c3:21which says, "And the LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them." Since you can't get the skin off of an animal without killing it and shedding its blood, then it is here we see the sin of Adam and Eve paid for by the animal that died and God accepting that sacrifice for their sin. ... For Adam and his wife Eve ... God made a way back into fellowship with Him.
- BUILD ME A HOUSE: God desires fellowship with you and it was so with His people even in the desert. Look at Exodus 25:8 "Let them construct a sanctuary for Me, that I may dwell among them." Sound like God wants to be among His people just as He was with Adam and just as He wants to today. So they built a Tabernacle as God showed Moses, it would be a copy of the one in heaven that was shown to him while he was up on the mountain. The Shekinah glory of God did come down into the Holy of Holies and God dwelt among His people while they were in the desert. And with that ... God made a way for His people.
- ♣ ENTER THE SON OF GOD: As it says in the 1st chapter of John, Jesus the Light of the world came into the world and the world knew Him not. Jesus taught the people that He was the only way to His Father; He is the truth and the life. No man can come to the Father except through Him.³ With Jesus' death on the cross, all the sin of the

¹ Romans 5:20

² The Tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil – Genesis 2:16-17

³ John 14:1-6

world (past, present, future) is paid for. Nothing you can do about your sin except what Jesus did and believe (Faith) in who Jesus is. Fifty days after Jesus rose from the grave He sent the Holy Spirit who would dwell in the hearts and lives of all who would by faith accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior ... God made a way.

Great Truth number Three ... You were created for fellowship with God



1 Cor. 1:9, "For God is faithful through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son Christ Jesus."

What is Grace



For those who are just beginning their walk with Christ and a refresher course for the rest of us.

Audience:

- For the non-Christian, or those new to the faith.
- Those searching for peace in their lives and for God
- A good refresher course for the rest of us

Objectives:

- Teach the basic meaning of grace and its origins.
- Establish the direction to go as you start down your path to conversion which is called "Sanctification."

suppose that if you were to ask ten different people what they thought the word "Grace" means you would get ten different answers. Grace is not something you can hold in your hand, it is not an object. Grace is a concept more than anything else and there is always two components to it, in that there is a giver and a receiver (Jn.3:16). Anyone can be a giver of grace and we all at some point in our lives have been a receiver of someone's graciousness and kindness, but most assuredly we are all receivers of God's "Saving grace."

For the moment let's take a look at grace from the perspective of our faith and how it applies to us.

1.10: What Is Grace?

The Bible never really gives us a dictionary-style definition of grace, but rather it teaches us by its many examples of grace. Understanding what grace is, means going back to the old Hebrew term that meant "to bend, or to stoop." Over time it came to include the Greco-Roman idea of "Condescending favor," but it is so much more then that.

A prominent Old Testament word describing God's grace is *chesed*. This word speaks of deliverance from enemies, affliction, or adversity. It also denotes enablement, daily guidance, forgiveness, and preservation.

The New Testament word is *Charis*. It focuses on the provision of salvation.

In the Hebrew the word used is "Chen" ⁴ (From the root word **chanan**), generally meaning "favor" or "good-will." ⁵

Genesis 6:8 "But Noah found grace [chen / favor] in the eyes of the LORD"

To deepen our understanding of grace we must remember that Jesus was Jewish. His references to anything resembling what we would call grace was almost

⁴ http://www.searchgodsword.org/lex/heb/view.cgi?number=02580

⁵ Ex.33:12,13,16,17,19; Gen.33:10

always with the idea of bestowing on, or the giving of "favor" to a person and it was far from condescending. If you look in the scriptures you cannot find Jesus using the word grace, but in fact He uses the word "*Charis*."

Luke 6:32 "For if you love them which love you, what thank [charis] have you? For sinners also love those that love them."

Charis, from a Jewish perspective can best be defined as a "Favorable attitude" towards someone who least deserves it. Paul was a Jew who grew up in Rome, he spoke and read Latin. He read the scriptures from the Tanakh (Jewish Bible) and its Greek translation called the Septuagint. He too in his writings used the word Charis ($\chi\alpha\rho\iota\varsigma$) at least ninety-seven times.

Grace is an attitude of unmerited or undeserving favor shown towards those who least deserve it.

Ephesians 2:5 "Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, by grace [charis] you are saved;"

When grace appears in scripture, the recipient never deserves it! When we come as sinners before God, we come with nothing to commend us before Him. God accepts us into His family, not because we deserve to be His sons and daughters, but because He desires for us to be His sons and daughters.

God's "Attitude of Favor" is the primary meaning of grace in the New Testament. To show grace is to extend or bestow favor or kindness to one who does not deserve it and can never earn it. In the New Testament, this kindness is stressed with having only one motivation - love. It is a fundamental part of the Christian faith.

Love that goes up is worship and adoration;

love that goes outward is affection;

love that stoops is grace.⁶

⁶ Loves that Stoops by: Donald Grey Barnhouse

1.20: When Grace Began

Many people seem to believe that grace is a New Testament concept that Jesus came to earth to show men the way to God, then died on the cross the one-time sacrifice for our sin's. The truth is that the first evidence of grace can be found as far back as the very first verse and the very first word in the Bible. That word in the Hebrew text is "Beresheeth" meaning "In the beginning," or "In the dateless past."

This explanation is lengthy and is covered in my study "Jesus in the Bible," however the short version is this. There are six Hebrew letters that make up the word Beresheeth, the **Bet**, the **Resh**, **Aleph**, **Shin**, **Yod** and the **Tav**. These six letters like every other letter of the Hebrew alphabet has a pictographic symbol connected with it. When you look at the pictogram spelling of the first word you will read something amazing. There buried and hidden away waiting to be discovered by those who seek is one of Gods great pearls of truth. It reads as follows, "*The Son of God* will be *destroyed* (killed) by *His own hand* on a *cross*." In the first word of the Bible we (those who seek) find the Gospel message proclaimed. We find Grace and we find the plan of God from the very beginning, before He created the heavens and the earth, He knew us. God foresaw our need of a savior and it was answered in His Son.

John 3;16 (KJV), ¹⁶For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

It started in the Garden:

God created man and He gave him dominion over all the earth to Adam and his wife Eve.

Genesis 1:28 (NASB), ²⁸ God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Psalm 115:16 (NASB), "The heavens are the heavens of the LORD, But the earth He has given to the sons of men."

When Adam sinned it changed many things. Everything Adam was given dominion over suddenly was different, their natures changed. All of nature (animals, birds, fish) suddenly became predatory in nature. The Lion and the lamb no longer laid down together, now the lamb runs for its life. The earth reacts to the sting of sin and morns and trembles under its heavy weight, and yes Adam and his wife Eve felt a change deep in them and covered up their nakedness, but they would soon grow use to its feel.

The first to experience this wonderful Grace of God was in the Garden of Eden. According to God's own law⁷ (Ezk.18:20) they should have died, but they didn't. So what happened?

Ezek. 18:20, (NASB), "The soul that sinneth, it shall die. ..."

God came walking in the garden in the cool of the evening and called out for Adam and Eve, it was the time of their usual fellowship together. What He found was both Adam and Eve now covered with fig leaves hiding in the Garden, when He confronted them about it they both blamed someone else for their sin, neither one taking responsibility for their own actions.

Now the scriptures are silent on everything that transpired at that moment, but after God handed out punishment on both of them and on the serpent⁸ He then makes coverings for them of animal skins and clothed them.⁹ So what happened to God's law and the punishment for the sin? It's at this point I will remind you of my opening verse.

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son ..."

⁷ Genesis 2:17, Ezekiel 18:20, Romans 6:23

⁸ Genesis 3:14-19

⁹ Genesis 3:21

One day while I was having my time with God I asked Him exactly when did He give His son according to John 3:16? The answer I got was "Before the foundation of the world."

Eph. 1:4, "According as he has chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:"

1 Peter 1:20, "Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you,"

Jesus Christ the Son of God agreed to take the penalty of the law upon Himself and He therefore become our substitute for sin even before we were created. The sacrifice of the Son, pleased the Father and so God gave His only Son because of love, because we who were not even created found "Charis" favor in the eyes of the Lord. Remember those six Hebrew letters and the story they tell us also, "The Son of God shall be destroyed by His own hand on the cross."

What was agreed to before the foundations of the world has also been referred to as "A Sin Bond." Now a bond (covenant) is something that is purchased or agreed to in the present, but comes due in the future. For this Sin Bound (covenant), the due date wouldn't be for another four thousand years on a mountain top called Calvary.

1.30: The Gift of God:

John 4:10 "Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water." 10



On His way to Galilee Jesus goes through Samaria and being thirsty He goes to a well for some water and there He meets a woman. During the conversation Jesus

¹⁰ Revelation 21:6, 22:17

refers to the "Gift of God" and that if she would have asked Him, He would give her "Living water."

Now there is a lot to be understood from this story, but for now I want to focus on what Jesus told her. Jesus is referring to Himself and He calls Himself the "Gift of God." He tells her that all she had to do was to ask, nothing else, no work programs, no confessing to a priest. No conditions at all, just ask and He would give her living water.

The Apostle Paul adds to this in His letter to the Ephesians when he declares that it is through faith that he receives the "Gift of God." When we then by faith receive the Gift of God we are declared righteous by God, not that we have done anything to deserve it, but rather it is totally based on what Jesus Christ has done for us, first the covenant was agreed to before the foundations of the world, then sealed and executed on the cross. Truly Jesus Christ is the Gift of God to the world.

1.40: The Last Covenant

Through the years God has dealt with His people through covenants. These are promises from God and most of them were based on man's obedience. Time and time again man proved unable to keep up his end of the covenant agreement.

It is in the book of Jeremiah where we find the first hint of the coming of a "*New Covenant*." ¹² This would be an everlasting covenant and the basis of it would not be based on man's work, but on His faith in God alone.

During His life on earth Jesus fulfilled all the nine steps needed to "Cut Covenant." The sealing of this New Covenant which would be a covenant of grace would be sealed on the cross. Jesus would soon pay the price agreed to before the foundation of the world and in so doing He would fulfill the "Law of God"¹³ concerning the penalty of sin. He would be taking our place on the cross so that we would not have to

pay the penalty ourselves according to our sins.

¹¹ Ephesians 2:8, 3:7

¹² Jeremiah 31:31-37, Hebrews 8:6-12; Luke 22:20

The Gift that had been offered up before the foundation of the world was now being claimed by the Law of God and with it the last of the covenants would be sealed. Only one last prophecy waited to be fulfilled. Then Jesus, just moments before He died said, "I thirst," one of the soldiers got a stick of hyssop and dipped it in some "posca," a cheap wine vinegar that was drank by both laborers and soldiers. The hyssop stick was placed to the lips of Jesus so that he could suck the liquid from it. Now all prophecies have been fulfilled and accomplished that had been spoken by the prophets concerning Jesus. Then Jesus lowered his head and with His last breath said "it is finished." 16

His mission, His work, the reason He came into the world was finished. There is no need for another work, or any new revelation. For all that man needed, or would need had now been given and the Covenant of Grace sealed. This was an eternal agreement between God the Father and God the Son, (in the flesh for man.)

Now I want to ask you ... is that a gift or what? We truly have reason to thank God for His gift and to praise Him for what He has done. Because of this Gift we will one day join countless millions of other brethren who have gone on before us and declare.

Revelation 5:9-13, "⁹For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, ¹⁰And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth." ¹¹Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, ¹²saying with a loud voice: "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain To receive power and riches and wisdom, And strength and honor and glory and blessing!" ¹³And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth

¹³ Ezekiel 18:20, Jeremiah 31:30

¹⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Posca

¹⁵ Psalms 69:21, John 19:28-29

¹⁶ John 19:30

and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: "Blessing and honor and glory and power Be to Him who sits on the throne, And to the Lamb, forever and ever!"

1.50: Freedom Giving

For the most part I was raised to serve God out of fear that if I didn't something bad would happen to me. That if I didn't pray every day things would fall apart, that if I didn't attend church every time the doors were open God would be mad at me, that if I didn't pay my tithes somehow my finances would dry up and I'd be destitute. There is only one word that comes to mind with this thinking and that's "Bondage," just the thing Jesus wants to set us free from.

It wasn't that these things we practice as Christians are wrong, quiet the opposite, they are for our own good to receive God's blessing and to draw closer to Him. But rather we must examine our reasons for why we do them. Somewhere in my journey I began to understand that I was doing all the right things, but for the wrong reasons. I was in bondage to fear, fear of what would happen if I didn't serve God.

As I began to understand more about grace, I began to change inside and with it my reasons to serve. No more was there fear of God, but love for God. My reasons were changing; fear was being replaced with love. Wow ... what a difference love can make in a life. For the first time in my life I was beginning to feel FREE.

Yoke Destroying ... Burden Lifting





Who can keep God's Law?

Grace can set you free to be who God made you to be and others around you to be what God made them to be. If we allow it, grace can bring about a change in our life that will affect every part of who we are as it draws us closer to God and permeates every part of us. To experience God's grace is much more than salvation to the sinner; it is freedom on a level never before experienced.

Something else I received when my reasons to serve God began to change, I began to feel more at peace. A feeling of calm, that yes God is there for me, He is in control so I didn't have to be. I could let go of the stress and really began to feel at peace. Surely I was beginning to realize what the apostle said, a peace that "...surpasses all human understanding." Truly this is the kind of peace that gives you hope when the world say's hopeless and a song in your heart and a smile on your face every day.

1.60: Living Every Day in Grace

The real challenge is living with grace in our lives on a daily basis and not just on Sunday's. Yes, we ought to be Ambassadors for God every day being examples of that faith that is within us, but what does God think when we are at our worst?

What about those times when we are tired and snap at everybody around us? Or when we get to work and our testimony is not quite the same as it was on Sunday? What about when we know something is wrong and we go ahead and do it anyway? How does God feel about us then? Can we really push God too far? Can we cross the line of no return? Can we out-sin the love of God?

Contrary to the words of a popular song, the answer is not "blowing in the wind;" ¹⁸ the answer is in one of the greatest, sweetest words we can ever know, that's grace. Yes, God's grace is a beautiful, enduring and loving thing. As the Apostle said, "... where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." ¹⁹

1.70: Grace Differs From Love

If grace is the process by which we are saved, then love is the reason for which the gift was given. Love by itself does not forgive our sins, but because God's love for us was so great, He GAVE His Son as a ransom²⁰ for our sin. Let's look at a verse we are all familiar with.

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

John is telling us that God loves the world and everyone He put in it. However, we know that everyone in the world is not saved, so love by its self saves no one. What love did, is that it gave so that whoever believes in Him would not perish. In this one verse we find the makings of a <u>conditional</u> covenant. God's love gave an offering of His Son, the condition is that you must believe in Him (Jesus), your reward is that you will not perish but have everlasting life. That is a promise you can take to the bank. God gave His Son + you believe in Him = everlasting life. The question is ... do you agree to this? Do you believe? If so, then you are given everlasting life, now the work of Sanctification begins.

Every person who is in Hell will one day stand before God in judgment²¹ and realize what God did for them and they rejected it. God tried to get their attention and everyone of them ignored God, or wanted to try salvation their own way, never believing that there is no other name under heaven that man can be saved

¹⁷ Philippians 4:7

¹⁸ Music by Peter, Paul and Mary "Blowin' in the Wind"

¹⁹ Romans 5:20

²⁰ Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45; 1 Tim. 2:6

²¹ Revelation 20:11-15

by other then Jesus Christ.²² Love didn't send them to hell, love offered up a lifeline to rescue them from hell and that lifeline we call grace and it was given to us as a gift from Love Himself.²³

Now, for those who have or will in the future accept God's gift of love, they will truly one day see God. They will walk on the streets of heaven, stand where Angels stand, and they will worship with the patriarchs of old and the countless thousands of thousands and tens of thousands who will be assembled before God's throne.²⁴ For them there is truly a mansion waiting for them in a land that never grows old and that is a promise from Jesus Christ Himself to you.²⁵ God sees us through the blood of His Son and we are declared righteous (even though we are far from it). Love is a person in the form of God and grace is what He gives. Love gave it, grace declared it and so we are... righteous.

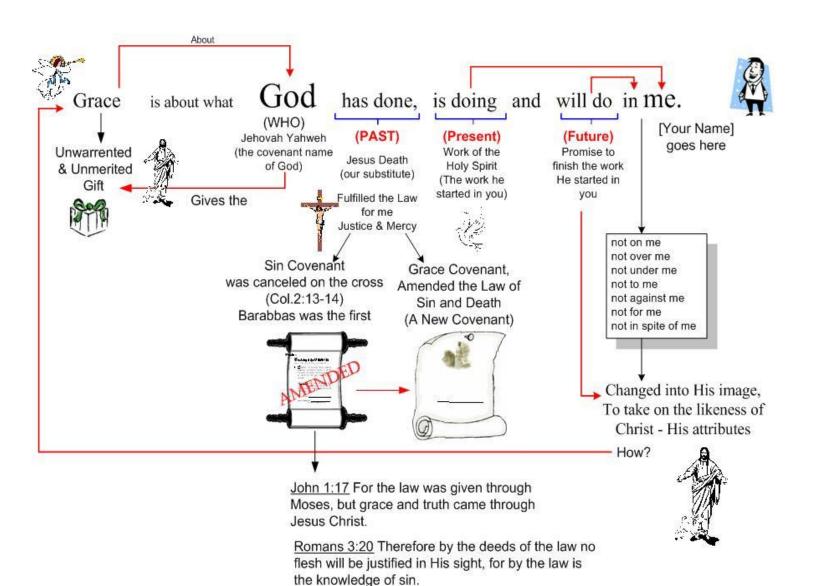
Grace is about what God has done, is doing, and will do in me! One day while I was thinking about God's grace in my own life, the first part of this sentence came to me "Grace is about what God has done" I wrote it down and started to think about that. Being a draftsman by trade, I started drawing lines and diagramed the short sentence. Then I realized grace is also about what God is doing now in the present. So I added that to my diagram. Shortly after, God told me grace is also about what He "will do," which to me means that God will finish what He started to do. It is a promise from God. Then the words "in me" came to mind and it seemed to make since then. By the time I had finished, I was looking at the diagram on the next page.

²² Acts 4:12

²³ I John 4:8,16

²⁴ Revelation 5:9-13

²⁵ John 14:2



Acts 13:39 "and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be

justified by the law of Moses.



Basic Christianity 101

Level 2.0

Lessons from the Book



VS.



Grace vs. Works

For those who are just beginning their walk with Christ, a refresher course for the rest of us.

Objectives:

- Understand the law of God
- Understand what Grace does for us
- Understand why works are important to the believer
- Moving further down the road to conversion (Sanctification) & living the lifestyle of Grace



The Law

n my studies I have found that many Christians believe that as believers they are not under what they call the "Law." It is also believed that Jesus did away with the Law in favor of Grace, so therefore the law does not apply to us today. In reality Jesus never said He has come to do away with the law, but to fulfill it.²⁶

Every Jewish person knows that there are three components to the law and every Christian needs to understand how these three components apply to them and what changed after Jesus fulfilled the law. What part of the law was Jesus talking about when He said He came "to fulfill the law"? In understanding this, you will know who Jesus is and why Jews and Christians differ in who they believe the "Ha Machiyach" (The Messiah) is.

2.10: The Need for the Law

Our need for the law is simply this, that through the law we have knowledge of sin.²⁷ The grace of God does not excuse us from the law. What grace does for the believer is that it takes away the sting of the law,²⁸ which is death, as it was paid for by Jesus Christ on the cross. The death we are referring to here is not the natural death of the body, but rather permanent separation from God which is considered the second death.²⁹

There has always been a law. Look at this scripture found in Ezekiel, "The soul who sins shall die...³⁰" This we call the "Law of Sin and Death" as it is referred to by Paul in Romans 8:2. This is the same law that was used when Lucifer sinned

²⁶ Matt 5:17-18

²⁷ Romans 3:20

²⁸ 1 Corinthians 15:56

²⁹ Revelation 20:11-15

³⁰ Ezekiel 18:20

and got him kicked out of heaven and separated from God. For in the spirit death is separation from God who is life and the light. That's why those who sin are considered to be in darkness, sin separates us from God.

Those without the Law

In Romans 2, Paul speaks of those who were "without law" from Adam to Moses. Without a written law, they were still accountable for their conduct. There was the "unwritten law" in their hearts that their conscience bore witness to.

Romans 2:13-15, "13 for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified; 14 for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, 15 who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them." ³¹

Through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.

John 1:17, "The law was given through Moses. Grace and Truth came through Jesus Christ.

Romans 7:7 "What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, "You shall not covet."

Romans 3:20 Through the Law comes	

What is Sin?

1 John 3:4 "Whosoever commits sin transgresses the law: for sin is the transgression of the law."

³¹ Romans 2:13-15

As long as man obeyed the "Law of God" he enjoyed the blessings of God. But how do you know if and when you have sinned, except there be a law to show us that we have sinned? By the way, because we live under the "New Covenant" (which Jesus gave) does not mean we are free of the law; it's just a matter of which law are we talking about.

2.20: The Divisions of the Law of Moses

* Moral Law - Basic moral principles (the Law of God)³²

The Ten Commandments ³³ (also called the Decalogue)



The moral law is an expression of God's character; it is the standard of all righteousness, an expression of His will. The moral law was not given by inspiration, but was written by God's own finger on tables of stone. The moral law is the embodiment of two great principles: Love toward our Creator and love toward our neighbor.

- 1. I am the LORD your God, you shall have no other gods before me. (Trust in God)
- 2. You shall not take the Name of the LORD your God in vain. (Respect, Holiness)
- 3. Keep holy the Sabbath day. (Renewal)
- 4. Honor your father and your mother. (Family)
- 5. You shall not kill. (Respect for life)
- 6. You shall not commit adultery. (*Chastity, Faithfulness, Fidelity*)
- 7. You shall not steal. (*Justice*, *Honesty*)
- 8. You shall not bear false witness. (Truth)
- 9. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife. (*Purity*)
- 10. You shall not covet your neighbor's goods. (Generosity)

³² http://www.sourcingcorner.com/wp-content/uploads/2008/02/10-commandments.jpg

³³ Exodus 19:1-17

In Matthew 22:37-40, Mark 12:28-31 we find that Jesus adds two additional commandments to this list, that if practiced would fulfill all of the original Ten Commandments.

* Ceremonial Law (Religious law)



The ceremonial or provisional law was added because of the transgression of the moral law. The ceremonial law consisted of ordinances, ceremonies and sacrifices and other rites associated with the Hebrew sanctuary service. These services in fact pointed to the future redemption through Jesus Christ. These laws were temporal, in the fact that Jesus Christ would fulfill these laws

through His life and death.³⁴

If a Jewish man was guilty of breaking the Moral Law, then he found himself having to deal with the Ceremonial Law. There within the temple he could find forgiveness and the washing away of the sin he had committed.

* Civil Law

Concerns man's duties to man: ie: Torts and the Process of Law; History and Philosophy of Law; Criminal Law and Procedure; Contracts; Property. Concerns of and for families, servants, strangers, justice including various regulations

Romans 3:19-20 ¹⁹ "Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God; ²⁰ because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law *comes* the knowledge of sin."

2.30: The Purpose of the Mosaic Law

- Not given to justify man (Rom. 3:20, Gal. 2:16).
- To "stop men's mouths", to keep men from boasting of their own righteousness and see themselves guilty before God (Rom. 3:19).

³⁴ Colossians 2:14-17

- To know what sin is (Rom. 3:20).
- To be a "school master" teaching and pointing men to Christ (Gal. 3:24-25).

According to I John 3:4 what is sin?

Knowing what sin is and that we fail to uphold God's laws should help us recognize that we can do nothing in and of ourselves to deserve God's forgiveness. The work of salvation and the ability to forgive sins is the work of God. It is His laws we break and it is only God who can forgive the breaking of His laws. What about our efforts towards righteousness, our works, our goodness?

Isaiah 64:6 (NASB), "For all of us have become like one who is unclean, And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; And all of us wither like a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, take us away."

The two-fold reason for Jesus' coming

The Law Savs

- (The work of the law... Ceremonial Law)
 Matthew 5:17 (NASB), "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill."
- 2. (The work of grace ... The Cross)

 Matthew 1:21 NASB), "She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."

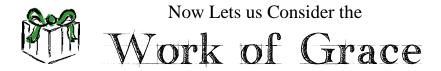
Contrast between the Law and Grace

Grace Savs

The Law Bays	Grace Says
Keep Off	Embrace Him
Bow the knee	Kiss Him
Punish	Forgive
Strip Him	Best Robe
Kill	Makes Alive
Demands Holiness	Gives Holiness

Romans 8:1-5 "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. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the **law of sin and death**. 35 3 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, 4 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. 5 For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the Spirit."

2.40: The Work of Grace



Consider the message of Galatians,

Galatians 2:16 (NASB), "nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified."

Galatians 3:24 (NASB), "Therefore the Law has become our guardian *to lead us* to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith."

³⁵ Ezekiel 18:20

To illustrate the message of Galatians 2 lets look back on the very first practical experience of grace. Barabbas was a robber, who had been convicted of insurrection and murder and had been condemned to die.³⁶ It was the Feast of Passover (at which time it is customary to set free some notable criminal).

Pilate gave them the choice between Jesus and Barabbas. They chose Barabbas. Jesus was then turned over to the officers of the law for crucifixion. His death was a **SUBSTITUTE** for Barabbas. Jesus satisfied the law and Barabbas was freed. If Barabbas, after having been set free, had gone to Calvary to witness the crucifixion, he would have seen who had taken his place on the center cross. Barabbas would have come to realize five things:

- 1. That he was a JUSTLY CONDEMNED SINNER.
- 2. That Jesus was an INNOCENT SUFFERER.
- 3. That an "innocent sufferer" had taken HIS PLACE.
- 4. That he had DONE NOTHING TO MERIT THAT SUBSTITUTION.
- 5. That Christ's substitution for him SATISFIED THE LAW.

If Barabbas had gone to Calvary to witness the crucifixion, someone might have recognized him and might have pointed him out to the Centurion as an escaped convict. However, Barabbas was the first person who could point to Jesus hanging on the cross and declare "that man, Jesus, took my place on the cross and his death, not mine, satisfies the law for me, and I am free to go." If Jesus had not hung on the cross for Barabbas, then Barabbas would have been on the cross satisfying the law for his own crimes.

Now, our position is the same as Barabbas'. The man Jesus, the Son of God, took our place, freeing us from the penalty of the law. The penalty of "Spiritual Death" was paid when Jesus cried, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?" And the penalty of "Physical Death" when He cried "it is finished" and yielded up the Ghost.

³⁶ John 18:39-40. Matthew 15:6-15

Isaiah 53:5 (KJV), "But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed."

It follows reason then, if our iniquities are upon Him, then they are not upon us.

There is one last point. How can an innocent person assume the guilt of another? Let's suppose we know a widow woman who was left in debt by the passing of her husband. To her surprise, there is someone who steps forward who declares his love for her and they become married. The bridegroom then takes on the responsibility and assumes the debt of the bride. It is the same with Christ, (the Bridegroom) who assumes the debt (of sin) of His Bride (the Church).

Romans 7:4 "Wherefore, my brethren, you also are become dead to the law (our first husband) by the body of Christ (Christ's death); that you should be married to another, even to Him (Christ) who is raised from the dead."

On the following page, I included a copy of "**The Law**." ... Well, ok, so it really isn't, but if we had the law to hold in our hands, it might look a little like this. The part of the law that I show is "**Section Two**" which deals with the breaking of the covenant.

Genesis 2:17 "but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

Ezekiel 18:4 "Behold, all souls are Mine; The soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine; the soul who sins shall die."

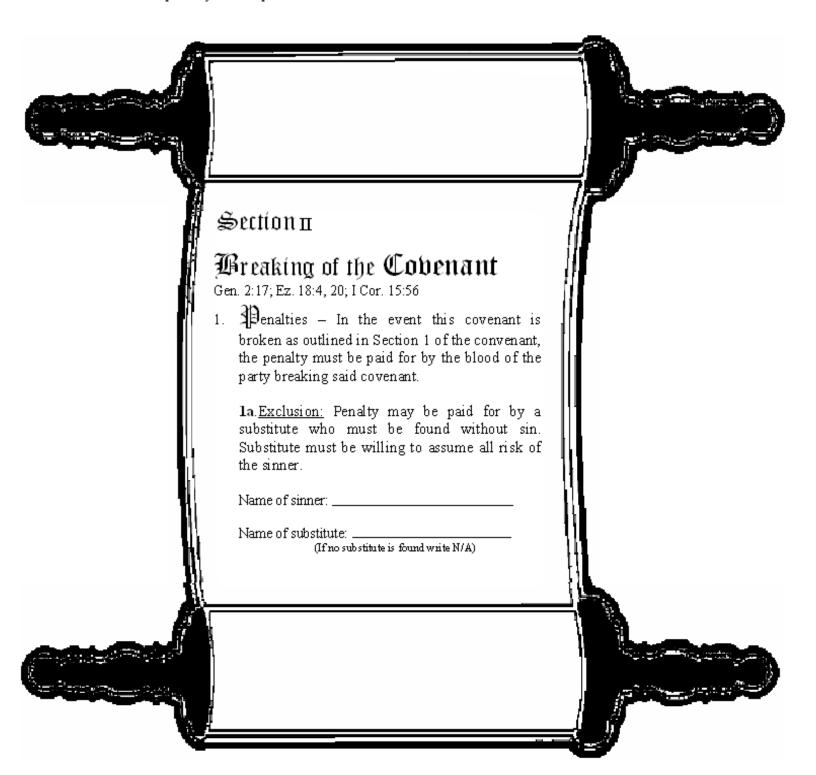
Ezekiel 18:20 "The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself."

Look at the law on the next page and you will find a place for your name. We all should write our name on that line because we all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. However, if you have accepted Christ as your savior and He is the Lord of your life, then you can write "Jesus Christ" on the second line because He is your SUBSTITUTE. That is Grace!

The Law

A Covenant between God and Man

[cov enant] "A written agreement or promise usually under seal between two or more parties especially for the performance of some action"



2.50: God's Work . . . Not Human Effort

God accepts us just as we are; there is nothing we can do to stop that. His love is based on Himself and not on us. This attitude of favor from God that we call grace is based on nothing else but our faith in him and has nothing to do with our works.

Let's look for a minute at our works, those good deeds that everyone does. If you're banking on those good deeds to somehow work in your favor at the judgment then you're making a huge eternal mistake. If you feel that you are a good person and that you do good things, that you give to charities, donate your time to the church; and even give tithe, that these things will be a plus for you in the eyes of God then you are making a huge eternal mistake. May I say that

Acceptance by God is never based on what we do.

simply being "good" and doing "good things" will not get you the gift of God. The simple fact is that our works and good deeds are like "filthy rags"³⁷ in the eyes of God.



Ephesians 2:8, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,"

It is now and will always be about the work God has done through His Son Jesus Christ the Messiah. It is never about our own human effort that moves God, except a prayer of forgiveness and ones faith in Jesus Christ. Two good examples of this can be found in the story of the thief on the cross³⁸ and the woman at the well,³⁹ both of which simply believed that the man they saw and talked to was indeed who He said He was.

Next, we must always remember that God does not send anyone to Hell. 40 It is His will that no one should perish but that all have eternal life. 41 It is our sin

³⁷ Isaiah 64:6

³⁸ Luke 23:39-43

³⁹ John 4:1-42

⁴⁰ II Peter 3:9

⁴¹ John, 3:15

nature and the decisions we make that send us to Hell. We want to live life our own way, to be our own person and this always ends in sin.

This life style will always be at odds with God. It causes us to move away from God as the center of our life, putting "self" the center of our life. Good works by themselves is an attempt to circumvent the work Christ did for all mankind, beginning back in the Garden and ending on the cross.

As a Christian, your works are important because they show to God your faith in Him, it shows obedience to Christ teachings, ⁴² it also shows to the world the love of your Father in Heaven through you.

James 2:18, "But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works."

Do you remember the story of the young rich ruler who came to Jesus ⁴³ and told Him of all his good deeds? Jesus told him to sell all that he had and follow Him. Jesus gave him an invitation to follow Him and have eternal life, which his money could not buy. The young man turned away and did not follow Jesus. He made his choice that day, for he could not give up his money, the real love of his life. This is why Jesus said, "it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." ⁴⁴ The road to Hell is paved with good people, good works and good deeds. None of them trusted God and His love and mercy to save them. So, does God really send anybody to Hell? The answer is NO! We send ourselves by the decisions and the choices we make.

Acceptance by God is never based on what we do, least anyone of us could boast of our good works.⁴⁵ It is based on our simple child-like faith in Christ⁴⁶ and what He did for us on the cross.

There could be no bigger insult to God than to think that your goodness, righteousness or good works could get you into heaven. In essence, you would be

⁴² Matthew 25:35-40

⁴³ Matthew 19:16-22

⁴⁴ Matthew 19:23-24

⁴⁵ Ephesians 2:4-10

saying that the sacrifice of Christ is of no use. Remember, nothing we ever do can make us worthy of heaven or to be called "Sons of God" for it is by faith that we are saved (Eph.2:8). Only by God's great attitude of divine favor, that we call grace, are we made worthy.

On the pages following "The Law," I have included a short description of God's simple plan of salvation. This should be "a must" reading for those who are not sure or who have never asked Jesus into their lives. This would be a good time to pause and take care of that issue.

⁴⁶ Matthew 18:3



2.60: The Plan of Salvation

esus Christ is the Son of God and therefore the only one who could be a substitute for our sin. The Bible tells us that God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whoever would believe in Him would not perish but have everlasting life.⁴⁷ This is God's plan of salvation, simple child-like faith. A simple act of faith triggers forgiveness through the grace of God.

You might ask, "Faith in what?" Faith that Jesus Christ is who He claimed to be, the Son of God, and being the Son of God, Jesus was the only one who could have taken our place on the cross.

In Matthew 1:21, Jesus tells us why He came, "to save His people from their sins." God loves you so much, that in His mercy, He allowed His Son to go to the cross to die and shed His blood as a ONE TIME sacrifice for all sin. God does not require anymore from us than faith in His Son Jesus who died for us. If we can just believe, then we can be saved. The "Good News of the Gospel" is that Jesus Christ paid the penalty for our sin; we don't have to pay it ourselves and it does not need to be paid twice. The grace of God has paved the way for those who will believe.

For those who believe and accept Christ as their savior, they can be assured that the "Good News of the Gospel" does not stop at the cross. It is that Christ rose from the dead on the third day and again appeared to His disciples before ascending into heaven. As Christ rose again, so will those who have put their trust in Him. Jesus said "that He must go away to prepare a place for those who love Him, and where He goes there we will be also." He also promised "that if He goes away, then He will come back to get those who love Him, so that where He is we may be also." You have an inheritance in heaven waiting to be claimed.

⁴⁷ John 3:16

John 14:1-3 (NASB), Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. ² In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.

This is God's message of love; that Jesus Christ died for our sins so we would not have to. By God's grace, we are saved if we will just believe.

My Friend: I am asking you the most important question of life. Are you saved? It is not a question of how good you are, nor if you are a church member, it is a question of do you know Jesus as your personal Savior? Are you sure you will go to Heaven when you die? If you cannot answer yes to these questions, then you need to meet Jesus, God's gift to you. Read over the scriptures on the following page and pray the sinner's prayer.

The Roman Road to Salvation

(KJV)

Romans 3:10 "As it is written: There is none righteous, no, not one."

Romans 3:23 "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

Romans 5:8 "But God commended His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

Romans 5:12 "Therefore, just as through one man's sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned."

Romans 6:23 "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Romans 10:9-10 "If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."

Romans 10:13 "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."



A Sinners Prayer

Heavenly Father, I come to you in prayer asking for the forgiveness of my Sins. I confess with my mouth and believe with my heart that Jesus is your Son. I believe that Jesus died on the Cross for my sins that I might be forgiven and have Eternal Life.

Father, I ask you to forgive me of my sins and cleanse me from all my unrighteousness. I ask you right now to come into my life and be my personal Lord and Savior. Because your word is true, I confess with my mouth that I am Born Again and Cleansed by the Blood of Jesus!

I thank you for your Love and Mercy that you have so freely given to me. I pray these things in Jesus name, Amen.



Welcome Home

So, Congratulations! If you read and spoke the "Sinners Prayer" asking Christ into your life, then you are now a new creature in Christ Jesus, **Praise God!** ... By the way, the angels are rejoicing right now.

On the following page, I included a not so official, but important looking document. I call it our "Petition for Mercy". When we humble ourselves and ask God to forgive our sin's, we are, in a way, petitioning God to show us mercy. When He does, He has then "AMENDED THE LAW" for us. At this point, God sees our sin through the blood-stained cross that His Son hung on for us. This process is what the grace of God is all about.

Now you can write your name on the line that says, "Sinner's Name", knowing that God has heard and accepted your petition for mercy, and your name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

I would like to quote a small section from one of Clarence Larkins books where he talks about this very moment. The scene is Christ (i.e. the sacrifice) carrying His cross and the Justice of God and the Mercy of God talk about the events that are unfolding.

And when the hour had come for the offering up of the sacrifice, we see Justice and Mercy standing on the hill called Calvary, and hear Justice say to Mercy, "Where is He who, before the foundations of the world were established, offered, Himself a **SUBSTITUTE** for the sin of all men?" "Behold Him," said Mercy, "coming up the Hill bearing His Cross."

When He reached the top of the Hill Justice presented the "Covenant," agreed to centuries before, and demanded its payment. The Son of God replied, "I will this day cancel it."

Soon all the preparations for the sacrifice were complete, and the "Lamb of God" was laid on the **ALTAR OF THE CROSS.** As Jesus laid His hand upon the crossbar of the Cross, He held in it, invisible to the human eye, the "Covenant" that was agreed to before the foundations of the world. When the Roman soldier drove the nails through His hands and feet, it fulfilled the words of the Apostle ...

Col. 2:13-14, "And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross."

And by His death the New Covenant spoken of by the prophet Jeremiah took affect and ushered the time and the Dispensation of Grace.

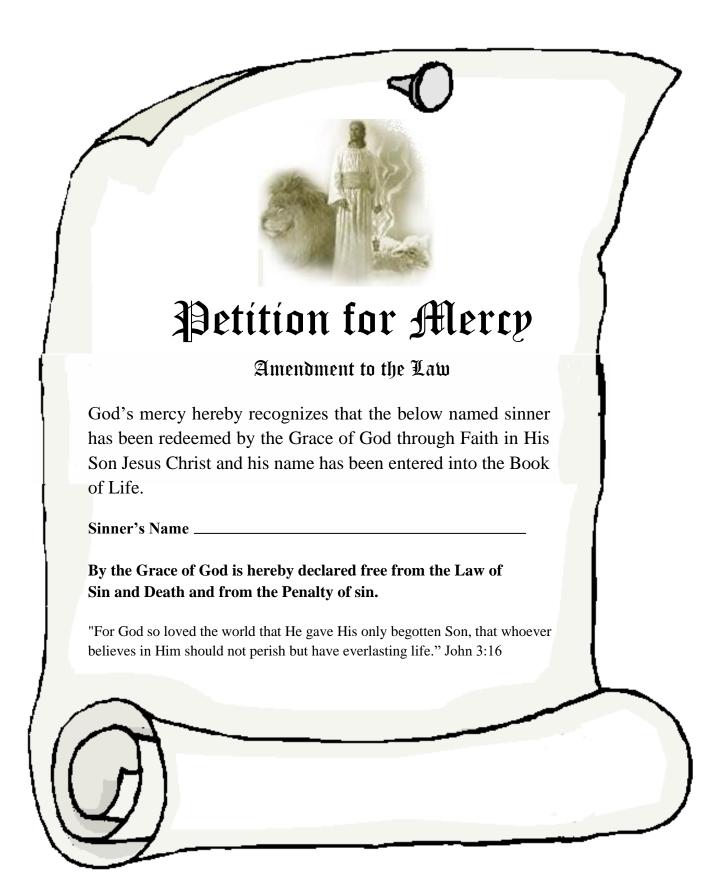
Jeremiah 31:31,33-34 (NASB), ³¹ "Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, ³³ "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. ³⁴ They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the LORD, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I

will remember no more." ... Jesus

Look what Love has done!



Basic Christianity 102, Lessons from the Book Grace vs. Works





2.70: The Journey

Once salvation has become a reality in the life of the individual it signals the beginning of a new journey we all take down the road to conversion. Salvation is instant, but the conversion experience is a process called Sanctification and that draws you closer to Jesus, to become more like Him. It is a narrow path through a narrow gate we all walk. The end of which is rewards for a life lived for God and an eternity with Him in a home He has prepared for you.

Matthew 7:13-14 "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."

During our lives we face many high points and maybe even more low points for there are many trials we all must go through. During our time of Sanctification, we will experience setbacks and out-right failures. To these we pray, ask forgiveness, get up and move on. We will also have seasons of victory, when you shine the brightest for God; you took a stand and made a difference. With each trial comes growth and a step closer to being more Christ-like.



Somewhere down that road to conversion you will begin to see changes in yourself, you will realize that certain aspects of your life are different now, maybe your attitude has changed, the words of hurt that flowed so easily are now tempered and soon will never be heard again. You will start to be happy for the others and rejoice for them that they too are blessed even though you are still praying for your own blessing. You seem to enjoy giving more than receiving and your very nature is undergoing a remarkable lifestyle change. You are seeing the budding of the first fruits of change, the first signs of a Lifestyle immersed in Grace.

CAUTION

Also a word of warning, don't become weary in your journey, for the road your on is narrow, many have started but few there are that will stay the course. To those who stay on course and keep their eyes on Jesus, well ... to them is the Kingdom of Heaven, they will hear, "Welcome home you good and faithful servant."



Growing in Grace

Level 3.0

Lessons from the Book

Freedom

Audience:

- For those on the path of conversion (Sanctification).
- Those searching for peace in their lives.

Objectives:

- To help the reader understand their freedom in Christ
- To teach how to be a freedom giver, set others free.



3.10 Slavery, a Matter of Choice

mazing grace, have you ever thought of why we call it amazing?

Because I believe that within those words we can find our freedom, freedom from those things which bind you in the flesh and in your spirit and your soul can be renewed by its creator. True freedom can

be felt in the inner-man and seen in the outer-man.

In December of 1865, the 13th Amendment to the Constitution was officially adopted, abolishing slavery in the United States. Though the slaves in the South were legally freed, many continued to live as slaves. Some slaves chose to return to the fields of their slavery even after being set free.



April 3, 33 A.D. (according to Josephus), Jesus Christ, the Son of God died on the cross for the sins of the world. His death on the cross officially abolished slavery for all who would believe regardless of race, sex, age, color or national origin. Although the Law had been amended by grace, many still choose to return to their personal sins and to voluntarily enslave themselves again.

Grace gives us the ability to shake off the chains that have bound us for so long, chains that stifle freedom. Many wars have been fought and many people have died all in the name of freedom.

One of the by-products of the Civil War was that millions of slaves suddenly found themselves free men, no longer having to work from sun up to sun down, carrying heavy burdens that claimed the lives of many of them. These people knew what it was to be bound, to be in slavery.

The Jews can trace their heritage back to the desert of ancient Egypt. Being bound to slavery they cried out to God "how long oh Lord." They looked for a redeemer and God sent Moses.



Today we are no different. We yearn for freedom from our sins, addictions, fears, and from the things that bind us, and God sent us His Son Jesus Christ.

3.20 The Old Nature

Before Christ came into our lives, we were hopelessly lost. We were helpless to restrain profanity, our insatiable greed, selfishness and our compulsions. We often turn to this behavior to please people or to control or manipulate others. Then one



day without really realizing what was happening we woke up to find we have become slaves to the same profanity; greed; selfishness and compulsions that we hated to see so much in others. Have we become like the ancient Jews? Chained to the slave block forced to serve the old master. Satan is that cruel slave master, full of anxiety and fear, stress and uncertainty.

Satan wants you to think, "You gotta take a beaten every now-'n'-then" just so you will stay in line. Listen; because Christ has set us free, the old master Satan has no right whatsoever to put a whip to your back. Those days have ended; grace changed everything. You're free now, because Christ paid the penalty for our sins and we don't have to keep paying the price. It's time to stop living like a slave bound to sin. You have been set free... so start living like it!!

3.30 Lay Those Burdens Down

Matthew 11:28-30, "²⁸Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ 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. ³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

What wonderful words to those who seek to be set free. Slavery comes in many forms and it binds the spirit in depression and anxiety and a host of other debilitating conditions. This is not what Jesus had in mind for you.

One Sunday during a Sunday school class hour these verses were read and while the speaker went on with his lesson the Lord focused my attention on the words of the verse. "Lay your burdens down," I told the Lord I have and He said back to me "then leave them there and stop picking them back up. This is my lifestyle for you." Funny how Jesus can speak volumes with just a few words, but with the words no matter how few or how many He always gives you the understanding of it.

Within these verses I began to understand, to see the possibilities of a new lifestyle, a new way to live, a way that is built on graciousness and love. It spoke of being free from

Freedom gives you the ability to let go.

the things that have bound me for so long. I was beginning to understand and to feel my first taste of freedom and I simply wanted more.

Freedom gives you the ability to let go. Take the yoke that Christ offers. It is easy and light; cast your care on Him for he cares for you. Let go of hurts and wounds that have never healed. Grace takes the blinders off our hearts to see others as God sees them. Grace gives us the power to forgive.

One day I was handed a note and on the note was some very profound words that touched my heart very deep, the note was signed by Jesus ... humm. I thought I'd share them with you now.



From Jesus in love,

"It always happens that someone makes your life difficult, that you are hurt and disappointed. And often you deal with these hurts for far too long. I want to offer you freedom in exchange for the hurt and the wounds of your heart. I want to help you trust others and let go of your fearful suspicions. I want to give you an open, vulnerable and loving heart. I came to this world to forgive you of your own faults and make you a new person, to bring you a new life and to heal you. Have the courage to deal honestly with the hidden hurts that constantly besiege you and forgive them. I assure you, that whatever you have been through, and whatever has been done to you, I can turn all things to good, and double what you have lost."

Jesus

No matter the depth of our hurts, grace gives us the freedom to let go and let God start the healing process in our lives. Let go of the hurts of the past and lay them down at the feet of Jesus. You do not need to be in bondage anymore, you have been set free ... Congratulations!

3.40 Self-Forgiveness

1 John 3:20, "For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things."

I found out that no matter how long you have been saved and no matter how close to God you may believe you are, you are not exempt from sin.



Two short stories I'd like to share with you.

Jack was the son of a preacher and served God for many years. Jack struggled secretly with a particular sin in his life and though he had prayed many times he still was drawn to it. The most interesting thing was that he never felt forgiven and so in his feelings of guilt the cycle continued. Another friend named David, having been in the military at one point in his life, had been sent off to war and had seen and done things that years later he was still dealing with. He too has prayed many times and he too still struggled with his thoughts and issues he received in the war.

In both these cases both men even though they were saved and God had forgiven them they still carried around the shame and the guilt. What they both failed to realize is that they needed to forgive themselves. They needed to let it go and lay the guilt down at the cross and leave it there.

There are many Christians are still struggling with sin because they do not feel forgiven, no matter how much they have prayed. Satan wants God's people to think that they have gone too far this time that God hasn't forgiven them and has stopped listening to their prayers. Nothing could be further from the truth and yet many still believe Satan's lie. Satan doesn't want you to ever get over it, to ever lay the burden of the past down and to never feel free.

Remember Adam and Eve in the Garden? Right after they had sinned they hide themselves from God for two reasons. The first thing was that they became aware that they were naked and was ashamed. Second, they knew they had sinned in disobedience to God's word to them, which was for them their law. Sin does the same thing to us, the first thing that happens is that we become ashamed of ourselves, knowing to do right, we choice wrong. Sin begets shame and guilt and what you choose to do afterwards is your choice. You can hold onto the guilt and shame and be in bondage to it, or you can lay it down and be free from it.



Do not receive what Satan wants to lay on you and know that "if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things." know that He has forgiven you, so you need to forgive yourself and lay that issue down at the altar of prayer. Then you will begin to feel free.

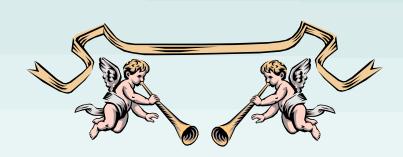
1 John 3:20 (NKJV), ²⁰" For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things."

Once we truly grasp the freedom grace gives us and realize the change it can make in our lives, then we can spend lengthy periods of our life without sinning or feeling ashamed. For those who feel they cannot stop sinning, you need to know that this is a lie propagated by Satan. We have been taught for so long how to deal with sin that we almost expect to be sinning.

Allow grace to make the difference in your life and learn to live your life in freedom. Teach it to others and let it make a difference in their life. Learn to live in freedom and you will be free, it is a freedom you can feel!

John 8:36 "Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed."





Peclaration Of Freedom

The Work of God's Eternal







Let it be known that the bearer of said document has been set free from the burden of sin per his/her faith in Jesus Christ the Son of God.

And Is hereby declared a Saint of God with all rights and priviledges of the Kingdom of God. Joint heirs with Christ to an inheritance now waiting to be claimed in Heaven.

All Heaven rejoices with you..Amen and Amen

Glory to God in the Highest

Name:

(As written and now appears in the Book of Life)







Lessons from the Book

Grace Involves Risk



"For there can be no true obedience from the heart unless there is freedom to disobey."

Objectives:

- To learn the difference between the risk and the struggle
- Moving further down the road to Sanctification

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fter the slaves of the south were freed by the Civil War, they found themselves in a new situation, one they had never encountered before but always dreamed of. They had been set free! Many of them started new lives with their newly acquired

freedom and never looked back. However, many never realized their freedom and found themselves going back to the life they wanted so badly to be freed from.

Grace is more of a privilege to be enjoyed and protected They went back to the backbreaking labor and long hours of hard work. They were not considered slaves any more, but they still functioned in that role.

4.10: The Prodigal Son Syndrome: (Read Luke 15:11-32)

In the story of the prodigal son⁴⁸ there are several lesson God wants us to learn from this story. There were two brothers; both were joint heirs to their father's kingdom. They youngest of the two decided the lure of the big city and all it had to offer was too much to pass up and so he went to his father and was given his inheritance as he had demanded.

Now the father knew the dangers there were in the world at that time. The father could have told his son "No," and to stay home. He knew the dangers of his son having his freedom, but the young man needed to learn to make the right decisions, what would he choose to do with his freedom?

With his pocket full of money he was off, straight to the big city and the time of his life, or so he thought. When his pockets were full the world loved him, he was their new best friend. The times were good the party was one for the record books. But afterwards when his pockets were empty and everyone had a good time at his expense he found himself alone and homeless. Notice that no one

⁴⁸ Luke 15:11-32

offered to take him in and care for him. He soon found himself in a pig pin with the pigs.

After some time he decided that even the servants in his father's house had it better than he did at that moment and so decided to go home. When he got home he was welcomed with open arms and a party to boot, there was rejoicing in his father's house that night.

Let's look at this parable a little closer for a moment. This parable is clearly meant for the believer, the Christian. The two brothers represent two types of Christians and two types of sin. We focus on the younger brother as an example of "The sin of the Flesh." Notice it does not say the father went after him, or did anything to get him to come home. It was the young man's choice to leave and only he could make the choice to return. When he did return His father treated

him with all the honor due his son, notice the young man never lost his status with the father even in his sin. Now this is grace at its best. Grace stoops and is full of love and forgiveness, through grace all things can be restored, we have a Father in Heaven who wants to restore those broken relationships with his children.



In this part of the story we find the best definition of Grace in the scriptures. Jesus used a parable to teach us about grace and in so doing He has defined it for us also. Grace by this example is unconditional love and a large dose of forgiveness. Where sin abounds, grace does much more abound.⁴⁹

Now the second son had a problem with everything that was going on. The older brother showed his true heart, it was selfish and self-centered. Not a single word about his brother being back because the older brother had a bigger problem. The same night their father gave a party to celebrate the return of His son, the older son decided to show his true feelings. He didn't hold back and he let everyone know of his displeasure and so he has become for us an example of the second great sin "The sin of the Disposition."

⁴⁹ Romans 5:20



There has been and will continue to be many arguments over which is the worst of the two great sins. One deals with a man's decisions, good or bad in the face of temptation while the second really goes to the core of a man's heart, it hints to a flaw in his character.

By the time we get to the last verse of the story the father and the older son are outside of the party and the father says something that is overlooked to many times missing another important issue this parable deals with. The father tells the older son "your brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found." Was his brother dead? No, he was in the party having fun, the father was talking about the time he was out in the world living for himself and full of sin, he had turned his back on his father and during that time the father considered him dead.

According to Ezekiel⁵⁰ had the son died in his sin while out in the world he would have gone to hell, because he had turned his back on his father and died in that condition. If we turn our back and walk away from our Father and our freedom and go back into the old life like many of the slaves of the south did voluntarily go back into slavery, we too like the prodigal son are considered dead and lost in our sin. Consider these verses:

Ezekiel 3:20 (NASB), ²⁰ "Again, when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and I place an obstacle before him, he will die; since you have not warned him, he shall die in his sin, and his righteous deeds which he has done shall not be remembered; but his blood I will require at your hand."

Ezekiel 18:24, 26 (NASB), ²⁴ "But when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness, commits iniquity and does according to all the abominations that a wicked man does, will he live? All his righteous deeds which he has done will not be remembered for his treachery which he has committed and his sin which he has committed; for them he will die. ... ²⁶ "When a righteous man turns away from his righteousness, commits iniquity and dies because of it, for his iniquity which he has committed he will die."

⁵⁰ Ezekiel 18:24-26, 3:20-21, Isaiah 55:6-9



The story of the prodigal son is a story of someone who has turned away from the Lord and returned, it also teaches us the about the risk of grace.

4.20: The Risk vs. The Struggle

The Risk

The "Risk" of Grace is that we can take our freedom and use it to sin and actually turn our back on God and return to our old life. This idea suggests a "TURNING" away from the truth that we have been given. The key words here are "turning away." (Reference Ezekiel 3:20-21)

Even though by grace we have been freed from our sin, it still gives us the freedom to return to our sin. Some have misread grace as a license to eat, drink and have a blast. As a result, they have rationalized their way around deliberate acts of sin and disobedience. When asked how they could justify such behavior, they almost always refer to grace, as though it is a God given license to do and act as they please. Twisting scripture to accommodate ones desires has nothing to do with grace. Such rationalization is liberty without limits, some may see it as amazing grace; but in reality it is abusing grace. So determined to do their own thing, they abuse the very freedom they have been given. Grace is more of a privilege to be enjoyed and protected, not a license to please your own self.

This same issue came up in the early church also (Romans 6). It seems that some of the saints practiced habitual sinning so they could receive more of God's grace. The thought was that the more they sinned, the more grace they received. Paul's answer to this was, "Should we sin that grace may abound, God forbid." ⁵¹

⁵¹ Romans 6:1-2.15

The Struggle

The Apostle Paul talks to us about a different situation that I call the "STRUGGLE" of Christianity and it is important to know the difference. For those Christians who have not turned away from God but earnestly seek to serve Him, then they can expect to experience what Paul did. They will struggle with sin

Ephesians 6:12 (KJV), "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places."

Romans 7: 22-23 (KJV), "²²For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. ²³But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members." ²⁴O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? ²⁵I 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.

In these verses Paul describes a battle that is going on for your soul, we are in a fight. The Apostle realized this as he experienced it also, even to the point of calling himself the "Chief Sinner." It is not a sin to be in the fight, for we cannot avoid this. However this does not mean that we are turning our back on Christ and running back into our old life, our old nature. The Risk, suggest the potential to give up and turn back, while the Struggle, suggest not running from, but getting into the fight and holding on to your faith in God no matter what.

We all will struggle with sin until God calls us home. There are some who will not finish the race, who will become weary in well doing⁵³ and turn away back into their old life and loose out with God.

⁵² 1 Timothy 1:15

⁵³ 2 Thess. 3:13



A Word of Encouragement

For those who have returned to their old nature and camped out at sin's doorstep should remember that God is the God of second chances. For those who are in need of a second chance and for those who are hurting need to understand that grace can change everything.

Christ has made it all possible. He is our sanctuary where the weary can enter and find comfort and rest. For the lonely, for the broken, for the hurting, there is safety found only in Him. In Him you will find an acceptance that no one else can offer, acceptance of a greater kind. And best of all, no strings attached. His grace can bring peace into your life like no other thing on earth can do. God's grace can take you through some of life's greatest trials and tribulations. Through these trials you will realize that through it all, God never left your side.⁵⁴ Through it all you have come to trust in Jesus and through it all God has shaped and molded you, like a potter with His clay, into His image.

Grace has opened my eyes. Over time I have realized that God has always been there for me. He has always been as close as the mention of His name and I have called on Him many times. I have realized that He will never let me go, no matter how far I feel I have fallen. I am thankful that God has very long arms to wrap around me.

Matthew 11:28 "Come unto me all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"

4.30: What Will You Choose Today?

Now that you have been set free by God's grace, you have a choice. Freedom is like that, it makes you choose. Every day when you get out of bed you choose to be a slave to righteousness or sin? Will you drag your mind through the gutter or will it soar with the Angels? Will you sow today the seeds of future heartache or the seeds of a life full of God's love? It's all about our choices. For there can be no true obedience from the heart unless there is



⁵⁴ Hebrews 13:5

freedom to disobey. The story of the Prodigal Son is an example of the risk! To believe by grace and to live by grace includes the reality of risk.

From the beginning, the Lord allowed mankind to choose between the real and the false, good and evil. Not to cause us to stumble but rather to prove our obedience and love for Him. Jesus warned that in the last days there would be many "false prophets." This is to be expected because the Lord also taught that whoever sows wheat in a field, the enemy will come along and sow tares in the same field. Tares look like wheat, and may even taste like wheat, but they are noxious. Obviously, the Lord wants us to learn to distinguish the real from the false. He allows the real to be tested by the false in order to purify what is true.

The risk of grace is that some will choose to abuse it. Some like living on



the edge of righteousness. They choose to live in the gray areas, flirting with the world and squandering their spiritual inheritance in prodigal indulgence. Paul dealt with these attitudes when he commented "shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" ⁵⁷ Paul taught that if we are partakers of grace, which is God's gift to us, then we are also partakers of Christ's death. The old

man you use to be and the old nature was crucified with Christ and therefore we become dead to sin, but awakened and walk in the newness of our new life.

Yes, we all will go through times of testing. There will always be tares in our wheat field, a decision to make, a test to endure. Many Christians can buckle under the weight of pressure to conform to the world's standards, to compromise their standards for a different set of morals. God wants us to know the depths of His love and that He cares about what we go through.

Read the following scriptures. In the scripture below, what does Jesus offer us? How can we accept His offer and apply it to our life?

⁵⁵ Matthew 24:24

⁵⁶ Matthew 13:24-30

⁵⁷ Romans 6:1



Matthew 11:28-30, 28 "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 "For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

Matthew 8:31-32, 36, "31 Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. 32 "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." ... 36 "Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.

What is it that Jesus is offering to you? Have you accepted His offer and can you apply this way of living for your life?

The freedom grace gives us, is the freedom not to sin anymore.

Remember who you are in Christ, you are full of His grace, so enjoy and celebrate your



John 8:36 "Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed."







Growing in Grace

Level 5.0

Lessons from the Book

The Journey Home

The Process of Conversion

(Sanctification)

That Narrow Path

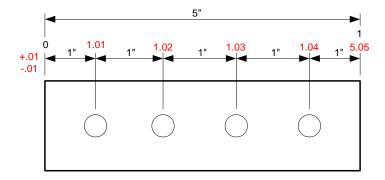
Objectives:

- To learn how to walk down that Christian road and recognize the many pitfalls.
- Moving you further down the road to conversion becoming more like Jesus

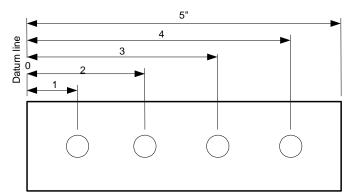
5.10 Tolerance

any years ago I made my living as a Draftsman for several large companies in and around the Houston area. After I had a particular part drawn, I would then add its dimensions so the machinist would know what the length and height should be and where to locate the holes as shown below. The numbers such as "1.01" indicate the tolerance that the machinist had to stay within to make the part fit its purpose.

In the first example below if the machinist allowed for the maximum buildup of the tolerances, the part would be to long and not work for its intended use. Notice the length should be 5" and that's all, but with the tolerance build-up, the part is actually 5.05" and now it is too long to fit its intended use.



The second example below is a fix for the problem. A point or edge on the part would become the "zero datum line." All dimensions are taken from a common source, which in this case is the edge of the part. This way we get no tolerance build-up in the part.



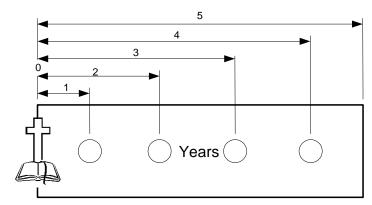
One day Jesus used this example from out of my work place to show me a spiritual truth. We all have become tolerant of sin in our lives. It starts out so small that we often over-look it, but over the years it takes a toll in our life. We have become indifferent to the swearing and to explicit scenes in the movies we watch, and on-in-on we go through life and our tolerance keeps building up.

The older we get, the further away from that salvation experience we go, and the more tolerant we become of sin. Instead of sin being a matter of right and wrong, black or white, it becomes hazy and difficult to see. Black and white seems grayish now. We have become too tolerant of sin around us and webecome lukewarm.

Let's just suppose that the zero datum line represented the day you asked Jesus into your life. You were washed clean and became a new creature in Christ. If every decision you made was measured back to the cross and back to that day you

accepted Christ into your life, then your appetite for the gray areas of life, your tolerance for sin that builds up over time would simply not exist.

Where are you today, and what tolerances to sin have built up in your life?



5.20 Watch out for the Ditches

Now you may feel there is a lot of obstacles on your road to conversion, maybe even a ditch or two that you may have fallen into. A ditch can become places where the Christian seems to camp out for a time and yes even find company in others that have falling into the same ditch. Remember that misery loves company and therefore some may never get out of their ditch. These lifestyle ditches can blind people to the truth. The ditch can become so full of like minded people that those in it actually believe that they have found a new truth, a new revelation of

Jesus Christ. What it really is, is a skewed perspective of what they once knew as true, they have chosen to believed a lie. 58

People in a ditch develop a lifestyle that is skewed and in error, they can develop a tolerance for sin, a taste for the old life has come back and if they are not carful they will find they are writing a new chapter in the parable of the Prodigal Son.

Living life in a ditch can cause even the most experienced Christian to act like a total jerk and bring their thoughts down to gutter-level. Life in the ditch can make even Christian tongues sharp like a knife becoming the cause of much hurt. Life in a ditch can cause the Christian to focus on petty concerns and critical suspicions until there is not much difference between them and the world.

If you have fallen into a ditch along your way, then you need to wake up to what has happened and which nature is controlling you. What will God have to bring to bear in your life to get your attention, to wake you up to what is going on and to get you out of your ditch?

Now Satan would like for nothing better than for you to stay in that ditch believing that no one else has your problems or knows your temptations. Can I remind you of something Paul told us?

1 Corinthians 10:13 There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.

Believe me when I tell you, we all "Fall down" we all sin,⁵⁹ but we all don't stay there. The secret to continuing down your road to conversion is in getting up when you fall down. Don't just stay there, find some help and get up.

If you could only understand the power of God's grace to forgive, to lift you up when you fall down, to pull you up and out of your personal ditches. Just this

⁵⁸ Matthew 15:14; Luke 6:39

⁵⁹ Romans 3:23

realization can help you to change your life, and give you a new outlook and appreciation of just how much you are loved.

Continuing down your road to conversion means "Growing in grace." It is in the letting go of the hurts of the past and learning to forgive as you have been forgiven. It is in learning to speak words of healing and not hurt, learning to love your neighbor as yourself and to do unto others as you would have done to you.

Know this and remember that you were loved so you may love; when you were hungry you were fed, so that you could feed; you were shared the word of God so that you could go and tell; and you were forgiven so that you would know mercy and through you mercy and kindness would live once more and be passed on.

Finally you were given an example through the life and the words of Jesus Christ so that now you may be an example of all God can do in a live surrendered to Him. When these things become your nature then your road will become easier and the ditches are fewer and not so deep.

5.30 The Struggle of Christianity

Our tolerance for sin can sure wreck a good testimony cant it? I believe the struggle we have as Christians is in the letting go of the past, the way we use to live, how we treated people and the way we thought. We were looking out for ourselves with no thought of God. The Apostle Paul addressed this issue in the book of Romans 6-8. We call this process of letting go "dying to self."

When we accept Christ as our Savior, we should at that time surrender everything to Him, but we don't, we hold back. You might be asking, "What am I holding back?" Here are some examples: your attitude, patience towards others, your thought life and what you let come out of your mouth. Are these areas that Christ died for also? If so, then what are you doing to surrender them to Christ. Did your road to conversion just take a serious uphill turn?



Each day we make choices. The problem is that too many times we choose wrong, knowing what is right. When we deliberately choose to disobey God what you're doing is exercising your freedom that you have in Christ. By His grace you have been set free from sin, but you still have a free will and you exercise it each day.

When you deliberately choose wrong knowing what is right, it proves that there are areas of your life not yet surrendered to Christ. What you are doing is giving Satan partial control over an area of your life, if only for the moment. It is at these times that the road your on will seem like the correct one, but in reality will be full of dead ends, loops and curves and possibly even another ditch or two. What seemed like the right thing to do can end in ruin and disappointment?



Your life is constantly full of choices and decisions. If you are listening to God, His Spirit can help you make the correct choices and follow the right path. God can make a hard and crooked road a lot easier to walk. For this to happen, we must have a heart and life that is surrendered to God. The rebellion must stop and you must surrender yourself to God. To have areas of your life that are not surrendered completely to God means those areas are in rebellion against God.

5.40 The Struggle of Two Natures

So this journey of Sanctification (conversion) is tougher then you thought right. You find that while on this road you have to deal with self-more than anything else. That's pretty hard to do for most people, were all better at seeing the errors in others then we are in ourselves. On this road you will have set backs, actually to move forward means taking a few steps backward.

Sometimes you have to backup for a moment and deal with attitudes that need adjusting, or life's issues that burden you down. Let me assure you that if you have baggage you are carrying around from past experiences, then you need to deal with them. If you ignore them or pretend they don't exist then in time they will demand your attention and manifest themselves in your life through anxiety, panic disorder, dreams, memories that will bind you and irritability that you can't explain. Inner turmoil can only be dwelt with in an attitude of forgiveness. If you have caused hurt you need to seek forgiveness, if you have been hurt you need to

learn to forgive.⁶⁰ You need to lay your burdens down at the feet of Jesus and leave them there.

If you have stopped along your journey to deal with some of what life has thrown at you then you are in a good position, because you are finding healing and experiencing love and grace, you are learning how to let go. Without knowing it you are being changed into the person God has for you and it's a good place to be.

Like the Apostle Paul, we too fight the good fight.⁶¹ Sometimes in Christ we win, sometimes in the flesh we lose, this is the struggle we all face. What is this then we have within us? There is only one flesh and one spirit, but we find two natures that seem to be at odds with each other. Like Paul said one must be crucified daily so that the other can rise up.

With each day and each event of the day you choose which nature will be alive in you, or which one will die. Since so much of your life is based in the habits you have developed, then work to develop Godly habits. These are revealed in the words you speak, the thoughts you think and actions you take. Show those you come in contact with what God has done in you. In doing so you reveal just how far you have come in our Journey. You have two natures, one should be dying in you, the second should be awaking within you, which one will you allow to live in you today?

Choose a new way to live that has eternal values, let the world see that there is a difference in you. Show the world the fruit of your life, may you speak words that heal and lift up, may your attitude and dealings with others always be God honoring. Let the "Fruit of the Spirit" be alive in you today.

Galatians 5:22-23, "²²But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law."

⁶⁰ Matthew 6:14-15, Mark 11:25, Luke 6:37

^{61 1} Timothy 6:12, 2 Timothy 4:7

Anytime our nature exalts its self then it is sin and rebellion against God. Sin manifests itself primarily in three areas, in our **words**, our **reasons** and our **thoughts**. That process of conversion is in dealing with these three areas and is all about what or who has ultimate authority in your life. Moving down that road is all about surrendering to God's authority in these three areas.

5.41 Our Words



Luke 6:45, "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks."

A life that is not totally surrendered to God will at some point reveal its true nature. Most people have some trigger point that really sets off that part of them that is not surrendered completely to God. The evidence of this can be heard through the words that they

I just cannot help it when I get mad.

speak. They usually justify their comments by saying, "the person had it coming" or "I just can not help it when I get mad." It's easy to be careful of what we say while we are at church or with good friends, but what about when you get home or you're at work? What do you let come out of your mouth then? Do you let your ugly side come out because someone crossed you and somehow you justified your words by someone else's actions?

It is really a condition of the heart; in this case you have not yet fully submitted yourself to God's authority and allowed it to change you. People make many excuses for the words they speak instead of taking the responsibility for what comes out of their mouth.

For the Christian, the Holy Spirit that dwells in you bears witness to you of the words you are about to say, if they are pleasing to God or not. Words of hurt and anger spring from the heart of a person who themselves have been hurt. The Holy Spirit checks your words and now you have to make a decision to let the hurt come out or submit those words you're about to speak to God. The right thing to do is to let the attitude go, let the hurt go. Realize you are better then what you were about to say and don't let those words of hurt and anger be found in you, but

rather it is more prudent to simply say nothing until a better more well thought out response can be made that is in keeping with who you are in Christ.

If you want to know if someone has submitted their heart to God, then listen to the words they speak. Are they submissive in their words? God requires the submission of our heart. We have to submit to God's authority or the problem will grow worse.

5.42 Our Reasons



We all have reasons for the things we do. Many of our reasons are just excuses for doing what we want to do and too often they conflict with God's will for us. For the Christian who is struggling with God's authority in their life this is one area that is the hardest to surrender over to Him.

One reason it is the hardest for us is because we use our reasons as a type of wall or a fortress around ourselves stopping us from fully surrendering ourselves to the will of God. Our reasons become an excuse to act on our compulsions, to say what we want, hurt who we want. Soon we have no control over the words we speak and we think we have a license to let our words and our thoughts run through the gutter.

When we get upset we tend to interject our own will and reasoning into the situation, and without realizing it we have justified the words we will speak, the things we will do, and the attitude we have, now we have become or have caused the hurt in someone else's life. When we deny God's authority in our life and take things into our own hands and we decide that the actions of others deserve all that we are about to say and all that we are about to do, then we are making ourselves their judge. In essence you are playing God, doing His job.

Only God knows all the facts and all the situations that make people react at that moment the way they do. Only God knows their pain and the burden they carry. The news of an illness they have been struggling with now weighs heavy on them, the sick loved one they have been up all night with, the divorce that was agreed

to, the job that was lost and the bills are due and the kids have needs a mile long, for all of this, only God is qualified to judge and He always does it from the position of love.

When our reasons come into direct conflict with God's authority in our life then for us it becomes rebellion. The world lives in its reasons and is in constant rebellion against God. So then what is the difference between Christians and the world if we also live our life totally by our own reasons and never submitting them to God? If we do not deal thoroughly with the things which motivate us, and our reasons, then it will be impossible to stop the words of rebellion that we speak and we will never realize God's authority in our life

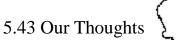
Our Reasons for Service

Even in our service to God we need to examine our reasons. One example that comes to mind is fear. Many were taught to fear God and so they have lived their entire life doing just that. They became fearful of what would happen if they didn't attend church, if they didn't tithe, if they didn't pray.

To operate in the realm of God's authority in you means awakening to His love and letting His love become your reason for your service to Him. Fear can motivate us, but it is short lived and can be overcome. When the person who has been serving God out of fear overcomes that fear they often become the worst offenders, the worst examples, because they now have nothing to check their spirit, nothing to hold them back and usually there is a lot of built up anger for the fear they have been living with.

If you are serving God out of a fear of Him then He wants you to understand you are carrying a heavy burden that was never meant for you to carry. God wants to take it from you and replace it with His love. Love then become the motivator for service, because He first loved us⁶²we can love and serve Him. Now from a position of love we can lay our burdens down and finally submit to God's authority in our lives.

^{62 1} John 4:19





II Corinthians 10:4-6 "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled."... The Apostle Paul.

Mans rebellion is a rebellion of thought Man's words come from his heart. Man's heart is ruled by his convictions and reasons, and his reasons are manifested in his thoughts. Therefore, man's thoughts are at the center of his rebellion, so his rebellion is a rebellion of thought. In Verse 5 above, speaks about, "taking captive every thought"

unto the obedience of Christ." Paul said that we have to overthrow strongholds, reasoning's, and every high thing rising up against the knowledge of God. Man uses reasoning's to build a fortress around his thoughts.

These reasoning's must be overthrown and our thoughts taken captive by God. Spiritual warfare involves storming this fortress and recapturing the thoughts. Actually, there is no such thing as freedom of choice in the world. We are captured either by reasons or by the Lord. We are either Satan's slaves or God's slaves. Formerly, we gave many reasons based on our own opinions. Now all our reasons must go and we owe our submission to whoever has captured us. A captive cannot present his own opinions, he can only receive opinions. It is the same way when we are taken captive by the Lord. We no longer express opinions or suggestions. Instead, we only take God's opinion. It is at this point that God's authority in our life becomes our overwhelming motivator.

I would like to share with you a piece of wisdom from a book by Charles Swindoll "A Quest for Character"

"Sow a Thought, reap an Act; Sow an Act, reap a Habit; Sow a Habit, reap a Character; Sow a Character, reap a Destiny."

All sin begins in our thought life. If we let our thoughts go unchecked and free to run astray we will eventually act on them. Soon what was just a thought in our head is now a habit we cannot shake. If the habit is not dealt with it will become part of our character and soon becomes a lifestyle and a destiny. We must learn to surrender our thought life to Christ, we will either serve Him with our thoughts or we will serve ourselves and our own lust and thus fall into another ditch. We cannot have, or serve two masters, two natures; one of them must die in us.

The last holdout on the road to conversion is our thought life. Somehow we fell it is ours and we can think what we want to. What a struggle it is to surrender our thoughts to Christ especially when we get the least bit upset. Our thoughts have to often become the last stronghold of our old nature that resist being converted into the image of Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians 10:4-5 "4 For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds; 5 Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;"

Strong holds are walls we build around ourselves in the form of excuses or reasons why we cannot or will not, surrender completely to God. The excuses and reasons are what needs to be overthrown so that our thoughts can be taken captive. Reasons and excuses are man's fortress, and his thoughts are imprisoned in it. Spiritual warfare involves storming this fortress and recapturing the thoughts. It is impossible to submit to God without overthrowing our reasons.

Only when a man's thoughts are captured can he truly submit to Christ.

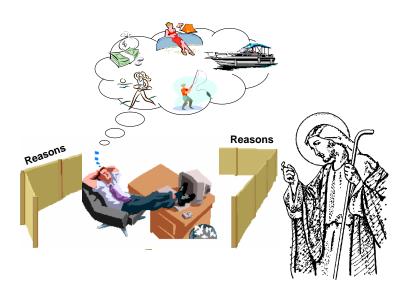
Romans 12:2 "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

Matthew 22:37 "Jesus said to him, "'you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind."

Colossians 3:2 "Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth." (Kingdom minded)

Ephesians 4:23 "and be renewed in the spirit of your mind,"

What's on your Mind?



5.50: The Attitude of Grace:

In Matthew 5:3-10 we find Jesus' "Sermon on the Mount." Here Jesus defines for us what I call "The Attitudes of Grace," spiritual traits that when put into action time and time again become the defining characteristic of the believer. When put into action, through daily living it then defines the person, in essence it becomes who you are.

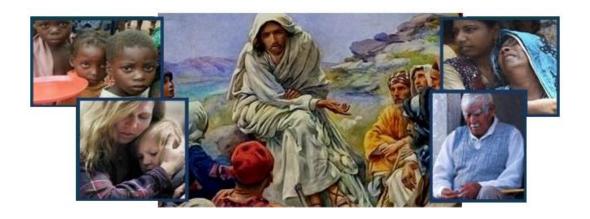
The Greek word makarios ($\mu\alpha\kappa\dot{\alpha}\rho\iota\sigma\varsigma$) is translated "blessed" and means "spiritual well-being and prosperity." This refers to the deep joy of the soul. Those who experience or live the first aspect of the beatitudes that is, the poor, they that mourn, the meek, those who hunger for righteousness, the merciful, the pure, the peacemakers, and the persecuted, will also experience the second aspect of the beatitudes, the Kingdom of Heaven, they will find comfort, they inherit the earth, they will be filled, they will experience mercy and will see God, they are called the sons of God and will inherit the Kingdom of Heaven.

The blessed have a deep joy inside them that transcends the trials of this world, for they have the Kingdom of God in them, experiencing a foretaste of heaven.



Matthew 5





"The Beatitudes"

Matthew 5:3-10

The Beatitudes describe the ideal disciple and his rewards, both present and future. The person whom Jesus describes in this passage has a different quality of character and lifestyle than those still "outside the kingdom."

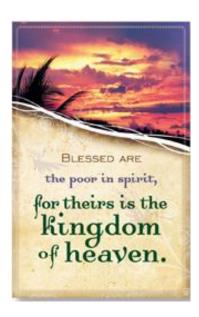
It is here in Jesus' teaching of the beatitudes that we find the

Deepest Joy of Our Soul

- 1. Mt.5:3, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven."
 - Humility The truly HUMBLE AT HEART, who rate themselves insignificant, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.

Simply put, humility is having a modest or low view of one's own importance. It comes from knowing and understanding that life is not all about YOU.

Consider this "True humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less."



- 2. Mt.5:4, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."
 - MOURNING In the Bible, blessed usually means "happy." But in the context of the Beatitudes, blessed most likely indicates "an enviable state." When a person has acquired good fortune, we call him "blessed." In the Beatitudes, Jesus calls some people "blessed" who appear to be quite the opposite. People who "mourn" don't seem to be "blessed," according to most other people. Jesus is contrasting the world's idea of happiness with true blessedness, spiritual prosperity, which comes from a right relationship with God.



The term "mourn" means "to experience deep grief." In keeping with His theme of spiritual blessedness, Jesus seems to indicate that this mourning is due to grief

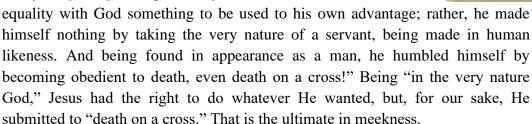


over sin. The people who agree with God about the evil of their own hearts can attain an "enviable state of blessedness," due to the comfort they receive from communion with the Holy Spirit. Jesus called the Holy Spirit the Comforter (John 14:16,26;15:26;2 Corinthians 1:4). The Spirit comforts those who are honest about their own sin and humble enough to ask for forgiveness and healing. Those who hide their sin or try to justify it before God can never know the comfort that comes from a pure heart, as Jesus talks about in Matthew 5:8

- 3. Mt.5:5, "Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth."
 - (GENTLE AND KIND) First, we must understand what it means to be blessed. The Greek word translated "blessed" in this verse can also be translated "happy." The idea is that a person will have joy if he or she is meek. The blessedness is from God's perspective, not our own. It is a spiritual prosperity, not necessarily an earthly happiness.

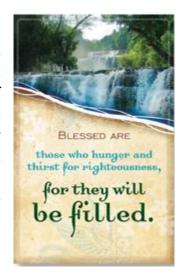
We must also understand what "meek" means. The Greek word translated "meek" is *praeis* and refers to mildness, gentleness of spirit, or humility. Meekness is humility towards God and towards others. It is having the *right* or the *power* to do something, but refraining for the benefit of someone else. Paul urged meekness when he told us "to live a life worthy of the calling we have received. To be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love" (Ephesians 4:1–2).

Meekness models the humility of Jesus Christ. As Philippians 2:6–8 says, "[Jesus], being in very nature God, did not consider



- 4. Mt.5:6, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled."
 - Blessed are they which do HUNGER ... Hunger and thirst, here, are
 expressive of strong desire. Nothing would better express the strong desire
 which we ought to feel to obtain righteousness than to hunger and thirst.
 When hunger and thirst become expressions long continued, seeking for
 and desired after, then He shall be filled.

They shall be satisfied as a hungry man is when supplied with food, or a thirsty man when supplied with drink. Those who are perishing for want of righteousness; those who feel that they are lost sinners and strongly desire to be holy shall find their satisfaction in God's abundant Grace. For where sin did abound, grace did much more abound. Never was there a desire to be holy which God was not willing to grant, and the gospel of Christ has made provision to satisfy all who truly desire to be holy.



- 5. Mt.5:7, "Blessed are the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy."
 - Blessed are the MERCIFUL That is, those who are so affected by the sufferings of others as to be disposed to aid in alleviating the suffering. This is given as an evidence of goodness and faithfulness. It is said that they who show mercy to others shall obtain it. For whoever will give even a cup of cold water to the least of men will in no wise lose his reward. The Lord will regard such acts of mercy as being done unto him and will reward accordingly.



Nowhere do we imitate God more than in showing mercy. In nothing else does God delight more in than in the exercise of mercy. To us, guilty sinners; to us, wretched, dying, he has shown his mercy by giving his Son to die for us; by expressing his willingness to pardon and save us; and by sending his Spirit to renew and sanctify our hearts. Each day of our life, each hour, and each moment, we partake of his undeserved mercy. All the blessings we enjoy are proofs of his mercy. If we, then, show mercy to the poor, the wretched, the guilty, it shows that we are like God. We have his spirit, and shall not lose our reward. And we have abundant opportunity to do it. Our world is full of guilt and woe, which

we may help to relieve; and every day of our lives we have opportunity,

by helping the poor and wretched, and by forgiving those who injure us, to show that we are like God.

- 6. Mt.5:8, "Blessed are the pure in heart, For they shall see God."
 - The Greek word for "PURE" in is *katharos*. It means to be "clean, blameless, and unstained from guilt." Interestingly, the word can refer specifically to that which is purified by fire or by pruning. John the Baptist told people that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire (Matthew 3:11). Malachi speaks of the Messiah as being like a "refiner's fire" (Malachi 3:2). Jesus refers to believers as being the branches and to Himself as being the vine (John 15:1-17). For a vine to produce fruit, it must be pruned. Those who are truly "pure," then, are those who have been declared innocent because of the work of Jesus and who are being sanctified by His refining fire and His pruning.

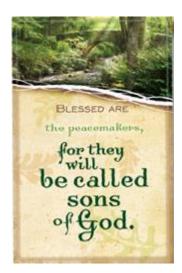


The Greek word for "heart" is *kardeeah*. This can be applied to the physical heart. But it also refers to the spiritual center of life. It is where thoughts, desires, sense of purpose, will, understanding, and character reside. So, to be pure in heart means to be blameless in who we actually are.

Being pure in heart involves having a singleness of heart toward God. A pure heart has no hypocrisy, no guile, no hidden motives. The pure heart is marked by transparency and an uncompromising desire to please God in all things. It is more than an *external* purity of behavior; it is an *internal* purity of soul.

- 7. Mt.5:9, "Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God."
 - Jesus laid down His life to make peace between God and sinners, and when we can carry that message of peace to others, we are PEACEMAKERS. God delights in those who reconcile others to

Himself, those who bring the gospel are "beautiful" (Isaiah 52:7). God "reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:18). Those who bring reconciliation to broken relationships are carrying on the work of Jesus, the Prince of Peace. Those who give of themselves as Jesus did in order that others may know God are called "blessed." There is no real peace apart from a relationship with God (Romans 5:1). What may masquerade as worldly peace is merely a temporary lull in chaos. True peace is found only in a restored relationship with God. "There is no peace," says the LORD, 'for the wicked" (Isaiah 48:22).

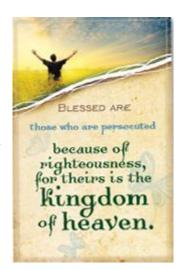


Only children of God can bring the peace of knowing God to others. A person must have a real relationship with God before he or she can help someone else know God. Those who witness for Christ, share their faith with their friends, and serve others in the name of Christ are the ambassadors for peace and are "peacemakers," and Jesus calls them the "children of God."

- 8. Mt.5:10, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven."
 - Blessed are they which are PERSECUTED To persecute means literally to pursue; follow after, as one does a fleeing enemy. Here it means to vex, or oppress one, on account of his religion. They

persecute others who injure their names, reputation, property, or who endanger or take their life, on account of their religious opinions.

For RIGHTEOUSNESS SAKE - Because they are righteous, they are the friends of God. We are not to seek persecution. We are not to provoke it by strange sentiments or conduct; by violating the laws of civil society, or by modes of speech that are unnecessarily offensive to others. But if, in the honest effort to be Christians, and to live the life of Christians, others persecute and revile us, we are to consider this as a blessing. It is evidence that we are the children of God, and that he will defend us. "All that live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution," 2 Timothy 3:12.



Theirs is the kingdom of heaven - They have evidence that they are Christians, and that they will be brought to heaven.

Jesus said, "If they persecute me, they will persecute you")⁶³

Within these beatitudes we not only find the new man in Christ, but also his "Newness of character." We are remade and have for those who will seek, a "Christ-like" character. The grace of God has the power to change you on the inside, to touch you so deep with love that who you are, has become who God intended you to be. You have started down that road of conversion, until every detail of your life will within time begin to look and feel like Christ.

There will come a time when Christ will present to His Father the "New completed you," faultless⁶⁴ and the man or woman that He intended for you to be from the beginning.

⁶³ John 15:20-21

⁶⁴ Jude 1:24

The sanctification of the believer involves becoming more like Jesus and less like ourselves. We talk about being more like Jesus, we have Bible studies to learn how to be more like Jesus and we sing about being just like Jesus, but when it really comes down to, does your want to ... really want to?

Being more like Jesus involves a degree of risk, sure it does. When you put yourself out there and take a stand, even if is a half-hearted stand, someone is going to notice. You should not be surprised if they treat you just like they treated Jesus.

John 15:20 (NASB), ²⁰ "Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also.

Expect to be made fun of, laughed at and be the brunt of some jokes. You may be threatened, because the closer to home you hit, the more they will resent you for telling they. Actually they don't resent you, it is God who they resent, but they can't see God, you they can see and so you become the target. Jesus has something to say to you about this if you have a moment.

Matthew 5:10-12 (NASB), ¹⁰ "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ "Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Matthew 10:22 (NASB), ²² "You will be hated by all because of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved."



Growing in Grace

Level 6.0

Lessons from the Book

Spiritual Warfare The Battle for Your Mind





Objectives:

- To prepare you to "Fight the good fight," that lays ahead.
- Moving you further down the road to conversion

6.10 You are a Warrior

hether you are just beginning your walk with the Lord or a seasoned traveler, one thing you do know, you will be visited and you will be tempted. In his closing comments in the sixth chapter in his letter to the church at Ephesus, Paul tells the Ephesians to be strong in the Lord. Though we all have earthly trials made of this world, we also have to then wrestle against the powers of the darkness of this world. It sounds to me as though we are in a battle and that makes you and I a warrior in the fight.



Ephesians 6: 10- 12, "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. 11 Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."

This fight is for total control of you, that's why you're in it. It is a battle for control of your mind and your thoughts, remember that all sin begins as a thought. In this fight you will need to be strong, you will need to be courageous, have no fear and do not compromise. All these are good words to hold onto as you venture out into the battle on your road to conversion.

6.20 The Weapons of War

The Bible makes no secret of the fact that the devil and his hordes are looking for every opportunity to get at the Christian. Peter warns us to "be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." 65 Let's look at three areas, that when used together can help us through those dark valleys of temptation. These three

through those dark valleys of temptation. These thre things then become our weapons to battle Satan's

To wear the whole Armour of God is to **Focus on Jesus**

^{65 1} Peter 5:8

attacks. These truths, when applied daily, can help overcome the temptations and obstacles that Satan puts in our way. These steps can help any Christian who is struggling, to be restored to the place and person Christ meant for us to be, an overcomer.

6.21 Support Groups

We can find strength and assistance in this battle by being part of a community of Christian fellowship. The power of prayer and encouragement we receive from our brothers and sisters can offer us protection from the enemy. A support group is a safe place to ask questions, build friendships, and experience mutual care and support.

In addition to regular attendance at church and Sunday School, other Bible



Studies and small group gatherings can offer support and strength when practiced regularly and where participation is encouraged. Small groups are the best context for developing solid Christian relationships.

One reason so many people find themselves walking a path of recovery and restoration is because they failed to get involved in a community of Christian fellowship for encouragement and spiritual governing. Such encouragement and accountability are crucial to all believers, especially believers who are being restored. These believers need the extended Christian family to support them in the healing and maturing process (Gal. 6:1-2; Heb. 10:23-25, 12:12).

We are all in need of an extended family of Christian support. We all need to be involved in a support group of some kind. There is always strength in numbers and we can derive much strength from one another as we all seek God and His strength.

A Small Group ...

- . . . is a great place to meet new people and make friends.
- . . . gives you a place to belong and a sense of community that we all desire.
- ... gives you the kind of support you need to continue to move forward in your spiritual journey.
- ... is a great place to uncover God's purpose for you in serving.
- . . . is a place where you can search the Bible with fellow believers for relevant application to your life.

6.22 Accountability Partners

Accountability is necessary for restoration because secretiveness, deception, and dishonesty have been a way of life for those who struggle with secret sin. Spiritual leadership and counsel from a brother-in-Christ can prove valuable in the daily battle over sin.⁶⁶ All Christians, at sometime in the Christian journey, go through their own



"valley of temptation and darkness". At sometime in our life we will all be in need of restoration. While others need to be willing to be used in people's lives as instruments of the healing power of God. Whether you are being restored or are coming alongside someone in the process of restoration, you can trust that Jesus is with you, enabling the healing and teaching you more about His wondrous love.

⁶⁶ Hebrews 13:17

Through the process of restoration, escaping the patterns of sin and bondage will mean spiritual warfare. God has provided armor to help us succeed.⁶⁷ Paul tells us to "gird our loins with a belt of truth, put on the breastplate of righteousness, be vigilant in preparation of the gospel of peace, take up the shield of faith, put on the helmet of salvation, have with you the sword of the Spirit, which is His Word and pray always for each other."

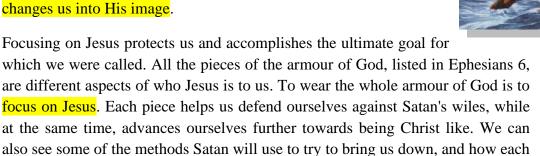
6.23 The Armor of God

piece of armour will protect us.



So much of Satan's activity is centered on trying to get our eyes off Jesus and onto ourselves so that we become the focus of our own thinking. It's only then that Satan can destroy us, (remember the story of Peter walking on the water.)⁶⁸ There

are so many ways Satan uses to take our focus off of Jesus. We need to stay in God's word daily to stay focused on Christ. John tells us in I John 3:3, "We know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." It's focusing on Jesus that changes us into His image.



Don't be bewildered about having so many pieces of armor. Once Jesus becomes our focus, all the pieces become one. In fact, we'll also see that it's much easier to keep each individual piece on when we wear our whole armour. It's only when we wear just one or two pieces that the pieces become difficult to maintain.

The Armor has seven areas of preparation that God has given to us. If we follow them, we can successfully stand against the enemy. The armour, when practiced

⁶⁷ Ephesians 6:10-20

⁶⁸ Matthew 14:29-30

and worn daily, can help you become an overcomer and win the battle of daily living for Christ. The Armour will help bring you back, becoming fully restored and freed from sins grip.



The Armor of God ...

... is different aspects of who Jesus is to us. To wear the whole armor of God is to focus on Jesus.



Know the Truth:

There is only one truth,⁶⁹ it is revealed to us through the word (John 1:1). We initially receive the Truth when we receive Jesus. We also receive Truth when we read His Word, the Bible. At least we read the truth. Only the Holy Spirit, if we let Him, can cause that truth to sink in and become the truth that abides in us (II John 1:2). That, again, is how we focus on Jesus, who is truth. He reveals His truth to us in three ways:

- 1. The Bible
- 2. Through the preaching of the word, Bible study and the Holy Spirit speaking to our hearts.
- 3. Through relationships in the Body of Christ. (Support Groups and Accountability Partners)

⁶⁹ John 14:6



Breastplate of Righteousness:

As we believe the truth of the Bible, we confess our sins and allow Jesus to clean us.⁷⁰ He makes us righteous. What we need, is the approach to righteousness that Paul found, the "righteousness which is from God by faith."⁷¹ The thing about this righteousness is that it requires no achieving at all! In fact, to make full use of it (which in a war one must), Paul found he had to disregard all his old achievements as though they meant nothing. On this breastplate, there's no place to pin old medals of achievement. But not only did he disregard all his achievements he gained as a Pharisee; he chose to forget even his accomplishments as an Apostle.⁷² He chose to forget the past - both the good things and the bad - and only regarded the righteousness he received through faith in Jesus. The old just wouldn't do.



Preparation of the Gospel:

"Shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel." This is a direct reference to a favorite verse of Paul's - Isaiah 52:7 "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace, who brings glad tidings of good things, who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, Your God reigns!" This is a call to prepare yourself with the knowledge of the scriptures in order to reach others for Christ. Without this piece of armour, it's easy for Satan to confuse us with all kinds of situations that are out of our control. Once we are wounded in the feet, it could be a long time before we again venture out to attempt any more work of ministry.

⁷⁰ 1 John 1:9

⁷¹ Philippians 3:19

⁷² Philippians 3:13



Shield of Faith:

Faith is the "Evidence" of our relationship with Jesus.⁷³ The Shield is a piece of our weaponry that we don't simply wear, but actually hold in our hands in active combat with the devil. The shield works for us when we see something coming our way, and we lift our shield up to fend it off. The other parts catch what we miss with our shield. Paul does mention a specific type of attack in regards to the shield of faith "...taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one." ⁷⁴Often, the shields were made, not of iron or bronze, but of leather stretched over a frame. The arrows could go through, and perhaps hit the breastplate and the helmet and other pieces, but the ones that were dipped into flammable liquid and lit, would be quenched by the time they got through the leather shield.

How do we develop our shield of faith? Make sure you have girded your loins with sufficient truth regarding your authority in Christ. Some good passages to read and meditate on are Matthew chapter 10, and Luke 10. Particularly Luke 10:19.



Helmet of Salvation:

The Helmet of Salvation is knowing the Truth. Jesus said that the Truth would set us free. In our fight with the devil we must "know" that we have victory over him because of Jesus. We can also rest assured that when we do accept Christ and put on the belt of Truth and of His Holy Spirit's empowerment, we will be changed into His image. That is the hope of salvation.

We maintain this piece of armour, by receiving the Truth that renews our mind. The reason salvation is described as a helmet that covers our head, is that it has to do with our mind being either on the ways of God, or else conformed to the ways of the world.

⁷³ James 2:18

Romans 12:1-2 "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 good and acceptable and the perfect will of God."

The renewing of the mind is one of the processes of salvation. That both keeps the "day of Jesus Christ" as a constant reality before us, as well as guides our thoughts and habits to be more in line with Him.



The Sword of the Spirit (Word):

The "Word of God" *Rhema vs. Logos*, In the Greek language there are two forms of this word. There is the "Spoken Word" (Rhema) Ex. Romans 10:17, and then there is the "Written Word" (Logos) Ex. Heb. 4:12. As a weapon in our hands *Rhema* is, to us, what the flaming arrows are to Satan's army - except much more powerful, because they are a part of God's arsenal. When we have been sufficiently girded with Truth - God's *Logos* Word - that Word is there, ready to become *Rhema* the moment we need to make a lunge at Satan's weak spot. The difference between the Shield of Faith and the Sword of the Word is that one is primarily defensive, and the other offensive. So how do we develop our ability to use our swords and shields? The two main ways are:

1. To receive Truth as the Holy Spirit teaches us, for the word of God is living and powerful. It is "sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

⁷⁴ Eph.6:16

2. To begin practicing it. In the context of the armour, we are talking especially about spiritual warfare. Our ability to exercise *Rhema* ought to be developed in other areas as well, especially in seeking God for direction, and in encouraging our brothers and sisters in Christ.



Pray For Each Other:

This last piece of the armor ties everything together for us. It is the "chain mail" that holds the armor in place. It puts the whole subject in the realm where it belongs. The first thing we noted is that "we do not wrestle against flesh and blood", but against spiritual forces. One of our primary functions in this is prayer. The phrase, "all prayer and supplication" (Eph. 6:18) brings our attention to the fact that there are many kinds of prayer.

It's true; prayer is simply talking to God. One doesn't need to be an expert at spiritual things to be able to pray. Just open up and start talking. On the other hand, once we begin doing that, and as we submit to the Holy Spirit, many avenues of prayer begin opening up for us. These include simply asking God for something we know is His will, and therefore asking with confidence (I John 5:14-15). Philippians 4:6 reminds us that prayer should be "with thanksgiving". It's important to maintain an attitude of thanksgiving as a part of our prayer stance.

"Being watchful..." - after all, we are in a war. As anyone who's been on the front lines of a battle will tell you, it's no place to relax and take it easy. As we grow in Him, we must, among other things, develop a 24 hour consciousness of who we are and what we're doing. This simply means, never forget who you are. Keep your spiritual ear in tune for the Holy Spirit's promptings, the same way a mother's ears are always tuned to the sound of her child crying from the other room. We need to spend time with Him on a regular basis, once you take the effort to tune your heart to Him daily, and then it comes more naturally later on.

Finally, we're told to include, along with the other forms of prayer, "supplication for all the saints". Not only is it our objective to protect ourselves by wearing the armour, but our concern is also for all our brothers and sisters in Christ - some of whom may be only partially dressed. But even the ones who are fully dressed need our prayer.



The Apostle Paul tells us in Ephesians 6:11 to "Put on the whole armour of God that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil." Up to this point in our study we have looked at the freedom that grace gives, the struggles that Satan brings our way and our own rebellion of words and thought. The armour of God is a means where God prepares us for the battle of standing our ground against Satan and his attacks.

When all the armor of God is practiced by the believer, he will focus on Jesus. There's really only one point to cover - that's Jesus. Who is Jesus to you? How important is He to you? Just making Him the focus of everything covers all the other points! That's why so much of Satan's activity is centered around trying to get our eyes off of Jesus. It's only then that Satan can truly destroy us.

Satan uses many different ways to take our focus off Jesus. Practically the entire New Testament tells us about the life, works and teachings of Jesus, so we can learn to keep our focus on Him. In the end, John tells us in, 1 John 3:3, "We know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." It's focusing on Jesus that changes us into His image. Focusing on Jesus both protects us, and accomplishes the ultimate goal for which we were called in the first place.

All the pieces of the armour of God, listed in Ephesians 6, are different aspects of who Jesus is to us. To wear the whole armour of God is to focus on Jesus. Each

piece of the armor helps us defend ourselves against Satan's attacks, while at the same time, advancing ourselves further towards being more like Christ. We can also see some of the methods Satan will use to try to bring us down, and how each piece of armour will protect us.

There's no need to be frustrated about so many pieces of armour to track. Once Jesus becomes our focus, they will all become one. In fact, it will be much easier to keep each individual piece on when we have our whole armour on. It's only when we have one or two pieces on that they become difficult to maintain.



Growing in Grace

Level 7.0

Lessons from the Book

The Road to Christian Maturity

Handling Disagreements Gracefully



Objectives:

- Learning to be gracious in times of disagreement.
- Moving you further down the road to conversion

7.10 In Spite of Our Differences

ne of the true signs of a life governed by grace is the ability to disagree without becoming unpleasant. In a lifestyle of grace, it will take plenty of grace when handling disagreements especially between fellow Christians. Tactfulness mixed with humility is a virtue of the life that is governed by grace.

I sat in a Bible Study group in a fairly large church here in the Houston area. Being a "Bible study" group you would think that it would be ok to voice your point of view of scripture, if not encouraged. However I found out, there was little room for apposing points of view. I was quickly called down for voicing an opinion that they felt was different then that of the doctrinal stance of the church. Eventually it came to a point that I was asked to leave the church.

In this Laodicean church age, we find that many of our churches have become less tolerant of those who simple have a different point of view. They are quickly branded as "heretics" in order to quiet them or get them to move on. You would think that the church is the one place where you could find tolerance, tact,

Grace understands, grace reaches down to the lowest and hard to love and wraps them in its arms.

plenty of room for disagreement, and open discussion. Instead the church too often becomes the worse cause of pain that creates within its own doors "walking wounded" and even driving many of its own into the arms of cultist movements.

In the name of God, many have been killed throughout history. Even today, we struggle with this in our world. All of this because we cannot seem to find common ground to get along and live as God directs each of us. God help us to be more accepting of each other, in spite of our differences.

Sometime back in the mid seventies, my wife and I lived in Paris, Texas and attended a small local church. An issue arose in the church that affected some close friends and they ended up leaving the church. Well, we weren't far behind, even though the matter had nothing to do with us. We left more in support of our friends.

About a year and a half had passed, when one Sunday morning as I was washing my car, I had an experience that changed my thinking forever. I heard the voice of God ask me, "why do you hate that which He love". The name of the pastor of the church came to mind. What was I thinking that year and a half? Did I think I was better than God to hate that which He loved? God loved that pastor. I called our friends and wanted to talk about the problem but all I got was hateful words toward the church and its pastor. I then realized that this is not me and I didn't feel that way, I knew I needed to talk with the pastor. That night God restored our friendship, we came back to the church and ended up being very close to the pastor and his wife until the time came for us to leave Paris.

Too many times our disagreements are nothing more than misunderstandings. Remember Paul's words in Ephesians.

Ephesians 4:32 "be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving to each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you."

Remember, who are we to hate that which (or who) God loves. He loves that brother or sister that you just had a disagreement with and said some harsh things to prove your point and get your way. You left them in your wake of self righteousness. Sure you may be a strong Christian and can stand a little fire under your feet but what about them? Did you trample over them in your rush for correctness? When was the last time you have seen them? Did they just drop out completely and become a causality of Christianity like so many have throughout the ages.

It's their fault right? They had it coming didn't they? ... WRONG! They deserve the same love and understanding that God gave and continues to give to you every day. They deserve grace. Grace understands. Grace reaches down to the lowest and hard to love and wraps them in its arms. Grace forgives when no one else will. Grace is accepting in spite of our differences. Remember, it costs no more, and it takes only a little more time to express our disagreements in tactful and gracious ways, rudeness is never appropriate and without exception, kindness is. We are the closest to God when we show His grace in spite of the circumstances.

Ephesians 4:29-31 "Let no unwholesome words proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

The scriptures tell us to study God's word. But nowhere does it ever tell us we will all agree on what it says. I believe this is all in God's plan. God certainly knew that man would have different view points about the message of His word. I believe God wants to see if we have enough of

And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you. Eph.4:32

His love for people and the kingdom to accept each other and find ways to worship together even though we may disagree. In heaven there are no denominations, no Baptist, no Pentecostals, no Catholics just the church, the Bride of Jesus Christ.

7.20 Why Can't We All Agree?

One thing I've come to know for sure and that is, that someone is going to disagree with you. God has given to every person a sense of variety and individuality that makes them who they are. We were not made to be robots but given the ability to reason and make our own decisions. God opened the door for opposing viewpoints and a variety of perspectives on just about everything. That is why we have different kinds of foods, clothes and cars. We can not be so stiff neck that everyone around us must think or believe as we do. Your theological persuasion may not bend, but your involvement with others must.

We are all so much alike and then again different. We may agree on Ninety percent of everything that is said or being taught but then our different perspectives kick in and we will see the last ten percent totally different. The problem with disagreements is that they involve people with various viewpoints and differing personalities and so therein we find the sum and substance of a clash. Many differences are not so much a right or wrong issue but a difference in our perspective of the matter.

The Bible holds God's eternal truths and teaches us His law and doctrines of faith, salvation and grace. These, He has built His church upon. God certainly knew that ultimately we would find areas of disagreement even on some of the basic issues. I believe that too was in God's plan. For its how we handle the disagreements that show God where our heart is and our love for our brothers and sisters in Christ. Putting all else aside, can we find common ground to worship God on? Can we find grace enough to accept our brother or sister in the Lord without a condemning spirit? For one day we will all stand before Him.

There will be no denominations in heaven. There is only one bride of Christ and she is made up of souls of many generations, nations, faiths, beliefs and denominations. What do they all have in common? They all love God and have accepted His Son Jesus as their Messiah. There is no litmus test of denominational belief, just simple child like faith. We will spend eternity together so we ought to get use to each other now and learn to live together like the brothers and sister in the Lord that we are.

7.30 Are We To Hard-Headed?

What does it take for God to get through to us? His focus and therefore our focus should be on love. In all its different shapes and fashions and in its many different forms, our focus is always on love. Sometimes it may cost us, but in the words of all three of my daughters, "get over it." Love does cost something and there are many who are just too hard-headed to let go of past issues with pride, anger, intolerance and self-centeredness.

Sometimes Satan can confuse every issue and like he does so often make a mountain out of a little mole hill. Most of us really have a problem identifying the real issue before us. The real problem is one of acceptance of others that are not just like us.

Can we get to a point of overcoming our hard-headedness and putting our prejudices away? When will we begin to see others as Jesus sees them? If we can not find acceptance for others who are different from us, then we have a problem with love and that means we have a problem with Jesus.

In Romans chapter 14:1-4, Paul say's to "accept or receive one another". In other words, have grace enough to allow others the freedom to hold to convictions that are unlike our own and accept them in spite of that difference. The secret lies in accepting one another and accepting our differences.

"Where the grace of God is missed, bitterness is born.

But where the grace of God is embraced,
forgiveness flourishes."

Food for Thought:

- 1. What does acceptance mean to you?
- 2. What type of things do we judge others for?
- 3. What did Paul say about judging one another? Is judging ever justified? (Romans 14:1-4)

We should not hate, despise, have contempt for, ridicule, shame, persecute, judge or look down on, the things and those people that God loves. We are not better than God or above Him. So who are we to hate that which He loves? For those of you who may still be skeptical may I also remind you of something else Jesus taught us.

The Lords Prayer

"Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen." (Matthew 6:9-13, Luke 11:2-4)

Romans 14:19 "So then let us pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another."

7.40 How to Tell if Grace is Alive in You⁷⁵

- 1. Are you always focused on things that encourage peace and assist other's to grow. Ask yourself these two questions before taking action or speaking up.
 - ► Is this going to make a lot of waves, or will it encourage peace?
 - ► Is this going to hurt and offend, or will it strengthen?

Consider committing yourself anew to encouragement and affirmation.

2. Don't tear down each other; it hurts the work of God.

Romans 14:20-21 "Don't tear down the work of God for the sake of food..."

You sabotage the Saints when you flaunt your liberty, knowing that they have convictions against it.

- 3. You exercise your liberty in Christ with those who can enjoy it with you.
- 4. You know where you stand and refuse to play God in anyone else's life. It is a full time job for most people to guard their thoughts, actions and their own words without the additional burden of examining someone else's motives. Let God deal with other people about their actions and motives unless God instructs you to do so.

When these four actions become part of your life they will signify that grace is alive in you. You will be free from worrying about others because you know God is working in their life as He does in yours. You will be free to help others grow in their faith and walk with God. You will be more sensitive to other people's individual convictions, and like Paul, adjust your freedom to the level of others

⁷⁵ Chuck Swin doll's book "The Grace Awakening"

who are not as far along in their walk as you or may share different views as you do.

You will have the grace to except other people's differences, willing to pray with them and for them, rather than challenge them. When you reach the point that these actions become part of your nature and are definable in your character, then you will have truly experienced the life changing power of **God's Grace** and be well down the "**Path to Freedom**"

Enjoy the grace that God gives to you. What He has freely given to you, learn to give back yourself ... become a GRACE GIVER.



- "When grace awakens, hope and joy dominate our days."
- When Grace is in your heart, your hope is to release others from fear, not create it. (Yoke destroying, burden lifting)
- Refusing to dictate to others allows the Lord freedom to direct their lives.
- Grace focuses on who God is and what He has done, and takes the focus off ourselves.
- By Grace, we are no longer helplessly bound by impulse and desires, but free to make our own choices.
- Grace gives freedom... freedom from what?
 - Freedom from sin.

- Freedom from guilt and shame.
- Freedom from damnable impulses you couldn't stop when you were in bondage to sin.
- Freedom from other peoples opinions, expectations and demands.
- Grace gives freedom... freedom to do what?
- Freedom to obey God rather than man or ourselves.
- Freedom to love.
- Freedom to forgive others as well as yourself.
- Freedom to allow others to be who they are different from you!
- Freedom to serve and glorify Christ.



The Mature Christian

Level 8.0

Lessons from the Book



Living the Lifestyle

Matthew 25: 34-40











Objectives:

- Learning to apply the lessons of grace to your everyday life
- Moving further down the road to conversion

o far in our study we have talked about many issues that pertain to God's Grace in our lives. We have looked at the need for grace and how it has the power to change us. It is a miracle to see a life that was once steeped in selfish ambition now changed and willing to serve instead of being served. It is a miracle when a heart of stone is transformed and made over into a heart of flesh.⁷⁶

If we are sincere in our desire to serve God and to be more like Jesus then somewhere along your path you will begin to see the evidence of your commitment to God. What has been growing on the inside should by now be seen on the outside and becomes the evidence of the faith that is within you. The new you must emerge and walk in a new lifestyle that fits your new inner man and is now on display for the world to see.

You have been on this path since your salvation experience and it has been worth it. You have grown in the Lord and in understanding. Though you're not perfect you are certainly changed and that New Man in you is looking more and more like Jesus every day.

8.10 The Awakening

If I were to ask how many believe they are perfect, I doubt if I would see any hands go up. Thowever, if I asked how many love God; all the hands would go up. So we have imperfect people who love a perfect God and all desire to serve Him. Christians are not perfect people. We make our mistakes, we stumble and fall, and we deal with our sin then get up and continue on. It's all part of growing in the Lord, its all part of our Sanctification process. That is what this journey in the Christian life is about, learning to follow, learning to serve, learning to love and to forgive.

⁷⁶ Ezekiel 11:19, 36:26

⁷⁷ Eccl. 7:20; Ro.3:10; 1 Jn.1:8-9

At some point in your walk if you are truly seeking Jesus you will have your own personal "Come to Jesus moment," of understanding, I like to call it the moment of your AWAKENING. For you it is the moment when you finally, "got it." Your eyes opened and you understand, and that moment of understanding has become for you a "Pearl of Great Price."



Pearls of Great Price

One night as I shared with a friend of all the things God has done in my life I was surprised to hear him make light of the things I shared with him. While on the way home I heard from the Lord. As before a soft voice spoke to my thoughts of the stories I shared just ten minutes ago. I hear Him say to me, "These are my Pearls of Great Price to you. Do not cast them before the swine. They are special to you."

We all have moments when the Lord shares something special and it touches your heart deeply. These become His pearls of Truth to you. Keep them close and guard them, because Satan will come and try to steal them away with doubt, and fear, and people who want to discredit you. The pearls you collect while you walk the narrow road will become most valuable to you the closer to get to Jesus.

The Mature Christian in You

Those Pearls of Truth that you have been collecting along your journey you have kept on the inside. What is on the inside of you was meant to shine on the outside of you. The inner person is making a difference and it shows on the outside. You are experiencing a greater tolerance of one another's differences, knowing that God is working in them as He has in you. You seem to have greater control of the words you speak, and you lift up and not tear down each other with your words. You are realizing you have a softer heart now, you truly feel for others, and that stony heart has been changed to a heart of flesh.

There is an awakening going on inside you and at some point you realize that your nature has changed. The old things you once desired are no longer considered and old habits have released their hold on you.⁷⁸ The struggle of your two natures is becoming less of a struggle and you are making Godly choices more often now as you follow the Spirit of God which is inside you.

Somewhere on your journey the person of Jesus Christ has been awakened deep within you. Your words are tempered and checked. Your attitude towards others is more gracious and your reasons for serving God are now founded in love and grace. Your friends, family and co-workers can see a change in you and may be asking "what happened to you?" You're starting to influence people for the Lord just by the person you have become, and your testimony is showing and it's a good one.

You may notice some other changes too, that even though you still have your everyday problems,⁷⁹ your road is just easier to travel and life is not such a burden anymore. You are letting go of the problems and giving them to Jesus, your life is a little easier and your burden seems lighter.⁸⁰ That rocky road you were on feels smoother now. This is a life you can get use to. The Apostle Paul put it this way "walk in newness of life" and again saying that "we should serve in newness of the Spirit."

When you take on the Lifestyle of Grace you are saying, "I have faith enough for today" to give my trials and my problems to Jesus. You laid them down at the cross and left them there. Now you have been awakened to a better way to live by grace. You are free, to serve God today, you are free to help others find their freedom, and you are free to be the person that God has made you to be. Those words "Well done good and faithful servant" are getting louder all the time. You are being re-born in character; you have been awakened into the Lifestyle of Grace.

⁷⁸ James 4:7

⁷⁹ John 15:20

⁸⁰ Matthew 11:30

⁸¹ Romans 6:4

⁸² Romans 7:6

⁸³ Matthew 25:21,23



A Few Great Lessons in Life

As I think back over my life, I can remember words spoken that I later realized can never be taken back, actions done (good and bad) now written in a heavenly book with my name on it. I



realize how many things I wish could be taken back, unsaid and the hurt undone.

We all have our reasons for moments in our life that don't shine so bright. Have you ever felt loneliness or emptiness inside? It's not good is it? That empty place is where God should have been, but instead we inserted ourselves and it just doesn't work out.

Looking back I have come to understand at least two great lessons I wish I would have learned early in life.

1. It's not all about You



This is an issue that strikes deep into the

core of the truly selfish at heart. Their entire world seems to focus on them, they want to control everything, they get mad with something doesn't go their way. If they want your opinion then they will give it to you. They didn't get their share, someone got more than they did and everything is seen in the light them first.

The world is full of those who think life is all about them. They are in the office place, trying to get to the next level often at your expense. They have always been in religion, in the Bible they are called "Pharisees," and they are still with us today. They seek authority and power over you, because in their eyes it is all about them. They think you are there to make them look good.

Something I have come to understand is that the world is a lesser place for all who think this way. They have fallen into a rut of selfishness, a ditch and the ditch has become so full for so long that they believe the ditch is where it is at. Self-indulgence and fear are things that keep selfish and self-centered individuals from experiencing that which is greater than themselves, and on them it takes a heavy toll. Too often their lives become ruined by the sin selfishness.

As the Apostle Paul reminds us the Christian life style is made up of. For those who truly seek need to look inside and make some changes. The Lifestyle of Grace is not for wimps.



1 Cor. 13:4-7 (NASB), ⁴Love is patient, love is kind *and* is not jealous; love does not brag *and* is not arrogant, ⁵ does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong *suffered*, ⁶ does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; ⁷ bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Paul lays it all out for us. Basically being a Christian and living the lifestyle clearly isn't for wimps. It takes more strength of character to stand for God in our core nature then to say "I want it my way." Standing for God takes strength of character, focus on the goal even when it requires changes in us that line up more with scripture and with Jesus. It's hard and requires dedication and so I say ... "It's not for the wimpy."

Again in the book of Luke we are being told basically thing.

Luke 6:27-28, "27 But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, 28 Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you.

Luke 6:31-32, "³¹ And as you would that men should do to you, do you also to them likewise. ³² For if you love them which love you, what thank have you? for sinners also love those that love them. ³³And if you do good to them which do good to you, what thank have you? for sinners also do even the same."

This world is not your home. This world has different values then you do, or do they? The example Jesus gave to us was all about acts of kindness measured in unselfish giving, unselfish deeds and motives. The primary reason for doing such things is conceived in a heart of love (1 Cor.13). Grace was conceived and born from God's heart of love and it should always be the motivating factor for everything we do.

Give yourself over to the greater good in all that you do. Remember this simple lesson, IT IS NOT ABOUT YOU!

Lesson number two

2. What is the Greatest Thing in Your Life?

Here we find the one thing that Jesus spoke about⁸⁴ that if we do it we will fulfill all the Law and then some, it is called the "Summum Bonum," (Latin for the highest good.) In Paul's letter to the Corinthians⁸⁵ he defines nine elements of love that when put into action make up the ultimate Summum Bonum.

For the sake of this study I want to focus on the subject of Paul's writing. Some time ago I heard or read a statement that still comes to mind in my dealings with family and friends and that is this, "Often those who aren't the easiest to love are the ones who need it the most." Wow, that should speak volumes to you. There are two groups mentioned, one that is not easy to love, but needs it the most, and the other are those who need to do the loving. Our biggest problem is that it is too often in family where there are years of hurt or abuse that has built up and needs to be dealt with first in an attitude of forgiveness.

Sometimes it is a hard thing to love, especially to love those who have caused the most hurt in your life. For those who have often caused the most hurt in your life will in time be the ones who need to do the most forgiving. In Christ we find a renewed spirit and a willingness to reach out and forgive and to love. Now I know many of you will say I have forgiven them too many times and I'm not doing it again. Well then ... again let me remind you of something, as you have been forgiven so you should forgive one another. 86

Life's greatest lessons is found in love in all of its forms. To truly love means we forgive when others use their freedom to do wrong to us. To have faith is a wonderful thing, to understand all mysteries and have all knowledge is a great

⁸⁴ Matthew 22:37-40

⁸⁵ I Cor. 13:1-13

⁸⁶ Mt.6:14-15, 18:35; Mk.11:26; Lu. 6:37, 7:47

achievement, but to have all this and not have love or the ability to love, then you really have nothing at all.

To be able to say "I love" is to be able to say "I forgive." To love means doing good to those who are hard to love and not just those who can equally give back. For the most part the world loves those who love them, so are we any better than the world if we only love those who can love us back? Jesus said to do good to those who hate you, bless them who curse you and pray for those who would despitefully use you. This then is our "Greatest Lesson" to love one another.

In a Lifestyle of Grace you will have many opportunities to practice the Summum Bonum, the greatest thing. The highest good a man can achieve is when he seeks not his own good, but the good of another. For that man has new understanding of what is the greatest thing in this world, but he knows it is not all about him.

8.32 Bound by Covenant:

In its simplest form a covenant is an agreement between two parties, what we would call today a contract. Our Bible is a covenant between God and man in it we can find Gods terms and His blessings if we will trust in Him and obey His commandments. In fact the word "Testament" is translated "Covenant." Since in scripture most all covenants were sealed in blood (Now we use a handshake) we could call the Old and New Testaments, the "Old Blood Covenant" and the "New Blood Covenant," both were sealed in blood.

In scripture there were many who made a covenant, a solemn oath to each other. Though they were not related by blood they were by spirit. The best example of this can be seen in King David and Jonathan.⁸⁸ To be bound by covenant was to be tied to each other closer than even family. It was saying that what is mine is yours also and who ever came against you also came against me. It was a bond that you would not ever break; in fact one of the worst things you could be called

⁸⁷ http://wiki.answers.com/Q/What_is_the_meaning_of_the_word_testament

^{88 1} Samuel 18:1-4

in scripture was a "Covenant breaker." There was a physical scar usually in the wrist that was proof of this covenant relationship that others could see.

God made seven covenants with man that are documented in the Old Testament and each time man failed to keep his part of the covenant. There came a point that God said He would make a "New Covenant with man," this was spoken about by the prophet Jeremiah. This new covenant would not be based on works but on faith which would produce good works. To seal this covenant there needed to be a blood sacrifice that would take the place of man, but was spotless and blameless before God. For this reason Jesus had to be born and come into the world, through this He would fulfill the requirement of the law once and for all, through Him all man would be saved.

It is through Jesus Christ this covenant of grace we have come to know was sealed. Through it all who would believe are now family, now all that we have belongs to God and all He has belongs to us, if we just have faith enough to claim it. We are bound by our faith to this covenant relationship with God which Jesus made on our behalf with His Father. Through this we have truly been born into the family of God. We are now "Bound by Holy Covenant," what is in heaven we have the right to call upon and to claim. When you are being treated unfairly then remember your covenant partner in Heaven knows and sees and understands and He will fight for you. When you are hungry and the debt piles up remember you have a covenant partner in Heaven and He will provide for you. Welcome to the family!

8.33 The Family

We are all born into a family not of our choosing. We all have a mother and a father with no guarantee or control over issues like race, gender, or religious upbringing, or where you were born. Some were born into families that were excellent in every way, financially sound and they received a lot of love growing

⁸⁹ Romans 1:28-32

⁹⁰ Hebrews 8:7-13

⁹¹ Jeremiah 31:31-37

up. They were encouraged and given the tools to go out and face the word and to succeed, but then there are those who were not as fortunate.

While on a mission trip to Kathmandu, Nepal in the fall of 2008 I was able to visit the orphanage that the local church was supporting. What I saw was a lot of great kids who had been rejected by their families and dumped alongside the road. All of them dreaming of a day when someone would come for them and make them part of their family. The need to belong, to feel wanted and cared about is so basic to our well-being and a natural part of who we are as human. I can still remember after my wife and I were married her father shaking my hand and telling me "Welcome to the family."

When we accept Jesus Christ as our savior we become what the kids in the orphanage are always hoping for, we become adopted with all the rights and privileges afforded to everyone in the family. Jesus will truly one day say to His Father, "This one is with me, He is family." We are adopted into a greater family with deep roots and just as deep pockets. In the family of God you should find acceptance on a level that you have not known before. In this family I found a friend that would stick by me closer than a brother, a friend that would never leave me or forsake me, ⁹² even though I accused Him of just the opposite many times while in the Army in Vietnam.

In the "Family of God" there is peace, and grace for all who love God. Now because we are all at different mile markers on our road to conversion we can expect to experience different levels and degrees of acceptance, peace and grace from among those who also love God, many are still learning what you might already know. Don't look down on them because they are not as far along as you are on their road to be closer to Jesus.

With God there is no shortage of acceptance or of love, and grace isn't just a word spoken lightly, but it's a way of life. There is love enough for you, love enough to heal a broken heart and for the lonely there is a friend⁹³ who will walk with you, believe me you are not alone. Simply stated, Jesus will be there for you.

⁹² Hebrews 13:5

⁹³ John 15:13-15

There is a love that is eternal and everlasting and that overcomes in the face of adversity. This love God wants you to know and it can be seen in the lives of those who love Him. For in love there is no half way, love gives its all. Love of family abounds in the Kingdom of God. You will never hear God say He ran out of love or patience, or grace for you. Love always lifts up, always encourages and always willing to forgive. Love makes few demands. There is indeed a never ending source of love and grace enough for you.

Acceptance Long Over-due

I did two tours of duty in Vietnam and I heard many stories of what to expect when I get home. Well it finally was my turn and when the plane landed at Sea-Tac airport in Seattle, Washington, sure enough, we were met by many protesters. I can remember the names we were called and things thrown at us just because of who we were. I had to tell myself I am not what they are calling me, they weren't there, didn't go through anything. They rushed us onto waiting buses and off to Fort Lewis we were taken.

I didn't know it but I would spend many years trying to hide the fact that I was a veteran. I couldn't find a job and only about \$60 a month from unemployment. I eventually made my way to a church in San Diego and there the Lord, led me to the most wonderful girl I could have ever met. Over time she gave me exactly what I needed the most ... love and acceptance. I still tear up some when I remember what her father said to me, "Welcome to the family."

Well times change and with it attitudes change especially towards the veterans. The first time I heard someone say to me, "Welcome home," or "Thank you for your service," I was in shock, but I did start to feel accepted.

I found something that was new to me, I found acceptance. I have heard "Thank you for your service," many times now and I'm comfortable with it, because it helps me feel accepted. Many years of carefully guarding my heart and emotions can relax, I home.



The family of God is forever growing and forever adopting those who will simply believe and trust in God. Those who have come and gone before us are there in Heaven waiting looking forward to that time of the great reunion of all those who throughout the ages have simply believed. For all of you who have never heard what my father-in-law said to me, then hear what Jesus says to you, "Welcome to the Family." ... "Welcome Home."



Now Faith, Hope and Love all come from His hand, Our hearts now have their freedom somewhere in a distant land.

A gift from your Creator, compliments of His love. That's life in the Kingdom somewhere in Heaven above.

The End



⁹⁴ Revelation 4-5

Grace... God's code word for Love

Love |s

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and love thy neighbor as yourself.

Love is gentle, love is kind, love is giving, and it's not blind. Love is choosing for the right, rejecting the wrong

Love is keeping His commands, greater love has no man than he lay down his life for a friend, love never ends.

Love is quiet, love is strong, love is patient, suffering long, where love lives there is no fear now can you hear.⁹⁵



⁹⁵ Matthew 22:37,39, John 15:13, I Corinthians 13:4-7

Notes

Acknowledgments

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