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“Committed to the Centrality of the Gospel”

Penn Valley Church

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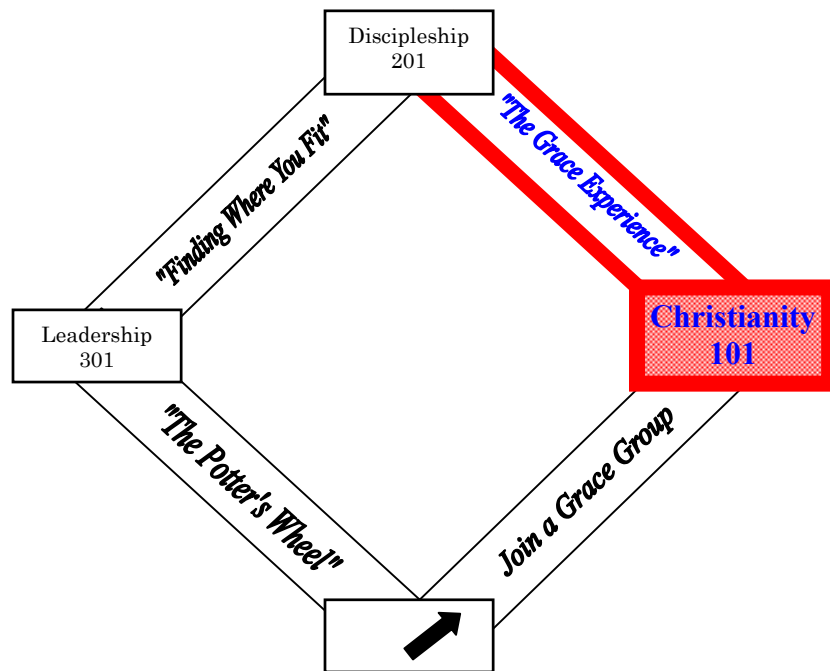
Introduction

This booklet is for you. It is a reminder that Penn Valley exists to help you become a loyal follower of Jesus Christ. We desire to assist you in your walk with Christ. Our tools are the Word of God, the Spirit of God and the people of God.

Growth and maturity is best realized in the context of relationships. I encourage you to join a Grace Group. Perhaps some of the individuals in this class will make up our next small group at Penn Valley. Enjoy your time in this class! God Bless!

Sincerely,

Pastor Tim



"Penn Valley exists to make loyal followers of Jesus Christ who love one another".

What's next . . .

- ✓ **Christianity 101** (The Gospel)
 - Making Sense out of World Religions (MS 121)
 - Making Sense out of The Church (MS 141)
 - Making Sense out of Biblical Values (MS 161)
 - Making Sense out of Relationships (MS 181)
- Discipleship 201** (Discipleship of Grace)

"Experience of Grace" Seminar

Offered the First Sunday of every month. Lunch and childcare provided
Please call the church office to register

The Great Decision (Salvation)

You have recently made a great decision! You may have attended our church service where you responded to the invitation to receive Christ, or you may have attended a Grace Group meeting and met Christ there. Perhaps a friend prayed with you to receive Christ, or in the quietness of your own home you asked Jesus Christ to come into your life and be your Savior. However you came to this decision, it was the right one! The decision to follow Christ is the greatest and most life-changing decision that you will ever make.

What does it all mean?

Do you understand where you stood before you decided to follow Christ and where you stand today having made this decision? Things have now changed. God sees you differently now and you probably see God differently. Let's think about what has happened to you. The Bible says, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

You were a sinner!

Being a sinner means that you have failed to do what God requires to be in a right relationship with Him. You have failed to fulfill God's Law. The Bible says, "...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God..." (Romans 3:23). Sin includes those things you do that are not acceptable to God, as well as things that should be done that you have not. We are speaking of both sins of commission and sins of omission in thought, attitude or deed.

As a sinner, you cannot please God

"As it is written, There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one" (Romans 3:10-12). No matter how hard you try to please God, without Christ, it is impossible. Most of us live our lives without even considering what God may expect from us.

You were dead in your sin!

Even though God loved you, you were separated from Him. Why? This is because God is totally good and perfect and will not allow sin in His presence. So, until you met Christ, you were not able to enter into God's presence. Christ is our passage to the Father through His shed blood.

Ephesians 2:2 says that you formerly "*followed the ways of this world.*" In the past, you lived for the world and its attractions-under the direct influence of Satan. This may be a strange concept to you. However, the explanation of Scripture and the conduct of our lives demonstrate this truth. And a lifestyle patterned after this world will never bring you to God. So every person under the influence of this world system must come to Christ!

Because God loves us so much...

God still deals with your heart through the Holy Spirit, no matter how hard-hearted you get. When something happens to you that leaves you desperate, empty. And in need of God, God is there to draw you to Himself by inviting you to know His Son, Jesus.

If you refuse God's love. . .

If you refuse to accept God's love and offer of eternal life through Jesus Christ, then you remain in your sin and continue to be separated from God. If you die separated from God, you are condemned to an eternity without God in what the Bible calls hell.

Ephesians 2:1-3 says, *"As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath."*

What must I do to be saved. . .

Good question! We often see people performing their religious duties with the hope of gaining God's approval. We have already discovered, however, that "doing good" cannot please God. Responding to the altar call after a sermon, in itself, does not save us.

If I can't earn it, and the preacher can't save me, what can I do?

This is another great question. Let's look at God's clear answer. *"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God not by works, so that no one can boast"* (Ephesians 2:8-9). You are saved by grace-favor that God gives you. It is undeserved, unearned, and given freely. Grace comes to us through faith. Faith is being totally convinced that something is true. In this case, it means having the assurance that Christ paid for your sins.

When we firmly believe that it is through Christ alone we have salvation (not by anything we have done), we have "saving faith." Before we have this faith, we experience no grace or favor with God. Ephesians 2:12 says, *"Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world."*

Because of faith in Christ, you now have grace and are in God's favor. Now you can enter into God's presence boldly, knowing that you have received mercy and forgiveness. God accepts you now through the work of Christ.

Now, what is expected of me?

In Ephesians 4:1-3 we see, *"As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."*

With God's help through the power of the Holy Spirit, you are called to live like Children of God. It is God's desire that your life reflect your new relationship with Jesus Christ. Your new life should be different from your old life. As you walk with Christ, you will learn humility, love, patience, and many other virtues (positive Christ-like attitudes) that will help people to see

God through the conduct and attitude of your life. As you are learning these virtues and walking in unity with other Christians, your life will be rich, meaningful and purposeful.

Questions

How did God see your life before your decision to receive Christ?

What did you do to become a Christian?

What one thing caused you to see your need for Christ?

How has your life changed since receiving Christ?

If you died right now, would you go to heaven? Why?

Going Public (Baptism)

In the early church people found water and were baptized soon after they placed their faith in Jesus Christ. This lesson is designed to help you see the importance of this practice that has been termed an ordinance.

What is an ordinance?

An ordinance is a recognized practice observed by Christians as a regular part of the Christian life. There are four elements that lead Christians to practice an ordinance. These are:

The observance is taught or commanded in the Bible

The observance satisfies the hearts and minds of Holy Spirit lead people.

Jesus commands the observance with the implications for perpetuation.

The observance presents a symbolic form which teaches a great spiritual reality

An ordinance is not viewed in the same way sacraments are viewed by churches, which practice these. A sacrament carries the idea that some special “grace” is received from God conveyed through the participation of the sacrament. For us, however, ordinances are “symbolic” reminders of great truths, not a means of grace. This is critical in our understanding and practice of baptism and communion.

Why Be Baptized?

Christ commanded it and made it a part of His great commission. *“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”* (Matthew 28:19)

The early church practiced it. In every recorded instance in Acts immediately upon receiving Christ as Savior, the believers were baptized: Acts 2:41; 8:12-13, 38; 9:18; 10:48; 16:15, 33; 18:8; 19:5.

“But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw.” (Acts 8:12-13)

The Apostle Paul was baptized: *“Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized...”* (Acts 9:18)

He baptized **others** *“I am thankful that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, so no one can say that you were baptized into my name. (Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don’t remember if I baptized anyone else.)”* (1 Corinthians 1:14-16).

“They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.” Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized” (Acts 16:31-33).

In one case he administered rebaptism Acts 19:1-7

What does baptism teach?

As a symbol it may appropriately point to a number of things about the believer's salvation experience.

First, it symbolizes the triunity of God who saves. “*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the **Father** and of the **Son** and of the **Holy Spirit**, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*” (Matthew 28:19, 20)

It is one whole act – baptism.

The three equal dips in the baptism point to the three equal persons in the trinity.

Second, it symbolically points us to the part each person in the trinity has in our salvation.

The Father is the **source** of salvation.

“*And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.*”
(I John 4:14)

- The Son is the **channel** of salvation.

“I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.” (Matthew 3:11)

- The Holy Spirit is the **Divine Agent** who applies the actual life of God to the believer.

“He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit...” (Titus 3:5)

Third, it symbolizes the believer's salvation experience in both the judicial and actual sense.

- It symbolizes the believer's death, burial, and resurrection in union with Christ – this speaks of our identification with Christ.

“Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin.” (Romans 6:3-6)

- It symbolizes the believers union with the Body of Christ.

“For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.” (I Corinthians 12:13)

Fourth, baptism is a testimony in symbol.

It speaks to the blessing that you have experienced in Christ and your salvation. Many are encouraged to hear God's faithfulness to save. Some will be challenged to their own need for Christ.

Why do we immerse?

- Immerse is the primary meaning of the Greek word *baptizō*.
- The normal understanding of the prepositions "into" and "out of" (the water) would indicate that immersion was practiced.
- The baptism practiced on a proselyte to Judaism was a total immersion (though self-performed), and this would indicate that Christian baptism followed the same customary mode (though performed by another).
- Immersion best pictures the significance of baptism which is death to the old life and resurrection to the new life (cf. Romans 6:1-4).
- Immersion was the universal practice of the early church. Every instance in the NT either demands or permits it.

The Greek language has words for pour and sprinkle, but these are never used of baptism.

Questions

Why is baptism important?

What is necessary before someone is baptized?

What does baptism symbolize?

Are you a candidate for baptism?

Next baptismal service at Penn Valley _____

The Gift That Keeps Giving (Grace - Part I)

Just before Thanksgiving each year, about five thousand logs are cut, hauled in, and stacked to make a huge pyramid that rises about 55 feet above the Polo Field at Texas A&M University. The night before the big “Turkey Day” game with Texas University it is ignited into a humongous bonfire which symbolically reflects Texas A&M’s burning desire to beat Texas University and to express the undying love that A&M students have for their school. In 1999 while students were building the bonfire, the center pole evidently collapsed causing the logs to fall resulting in the death of 12 students and in the injury of 28 others. Because of the great rivalry that has existed between these two schools over the years, the competitive spirit has sometimes manifested itself in less than friendly behavior. This tragedy, however, seemed to bring the two schools together in a unique way. As an illustration, during the ceremonies at halftime, the Texas University band marched out on the field playing the great old hymn, “Amazing Grace.” As the band played “Amazing Grace,” one must wonder how many people in the stands and watching on television had any concept of the awesome and amazing nature of God’s grace as it has been manifested for us in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

As the band performed, the words of the hymn immediately came to mind, “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.” Most people, including born again believers, do not think of themselves as wretches, but the author of “Amazing Grace” did. John Newton wrote the hymn after a close encounter with death on the high seas in the mid 1700’s.

Amazing Grace was the story of his life. Every word was pulled with pain from the dark days and the treacherous times of his early sea-faring youth to the wondrous joy of his discovery of the love of God. His epitaph, written by his own hand, tells more eloquently than any other words the extent of depth and height experienced: “John Newton, clerk, once an infidel and libertine, was by the rich mercy of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, preserved, restored, pardoned and appointed to preach the faith he had long labored to destroy.” Every line of his hymn is filled with tears of remorse because of the greatness of his sin, and expressions of joy because of the discovery of God’s grace.¹

Regarding his previous and wretched spiritual condition, Newton said, “I was capable of anything. I had not the least fear of God before my eyes... I not only sinned myself, but made it my study to tempt and seduce others.”² Surely, being redeemed out of such a wretched spiritual state, as the hymn described it, helped Newton see and appreciate the matchless grace of God. Later he wrote, “I needed someone to stand between me and a holy God who must punish my sins and blasphemies. I needed an Almighty Savior who would step in and take my sins away... I saw that Christ took my punishment so that I might be pardoned.”³

¹ Helen Salem Rizk, *Stories of Christian Hymns* (Abingdon, Nashville, 1964), 7.

² Quoted by Lutzer in *How You Can Be Sure You Will Spend Eternity With God*, 29.

³ *ibid*, p. 30.

But most often, those who have never gone to the depths of sin like Newton think they do not need as much of the grace of God as did Newton or some notorious criminal. If we fail to see ourselves as wretched sinners, grace will not be so amazing and awesome. As Irwin Lutzer so appropriately put it regarding people who do not see their need of grace ... They see grace as nice, helpful—even necessary—but not really amazing.

Here is something you can count on: The better you believe yourself to be, the less grace you think you need. The more self-confident you are, the more convinced you'll be that you could get by even if God were stingy with grace. Sure, you struggle with sin, but that's just a part of the human predicament. All you need is some help from God and a bit of personal determination. You can make yourself good enough for God to accept you. You just need to get desperate enough to clean up your act. If grace can help you—fine.⁴

So What is Grace?

I have heard people say that they are striving for grace. While the context didn't give much indication as to what he meant, the idea of "striving" suggests struggle, toil, work, extreme exertion. In other words, striving suggests doing something to gain grace. While one might strive to promote and defend God's grace as a fundamental truth of Scripture or strive to be a gracious person, the phrase *striving for grace* is really a contradiction in the fundamental meaning of grace as it is used in the Bible.

In the Bible, *grace* is the Greek term *charis*, and like our English word, it may mean "graciousness" "attractiveness" or even "charm." But when we consider the meaning of this word as it is used in the Bible, it refers to the free, unmerited favor of God; to the favor or kindness given to those who can never deserve it or earn it by anything they do or refrain from doing. Someone has said, "Every time the thought of grace appears, there is the idea of its being undeserved. In no way is the recipient getting what he or she deserves. Favor is being extended simply out of the goodness of the heart of the giver."⁴

After discussing the meaning and use of both the Old and New Testament words for grace, Ryrie concludes with the following excellent summary:

The concept of grace in the New Testament, is infinitely and uniquely heightened by its association with the Saviour. The lavish gift of God in the person of His Son is the particularly New Testament meaning of grace. This is why it is quite true to say that *charis* is a word that has been raised to a higher level and filled with new meaning by our Lord Jesus Christ. His self-sacrifice is grace itself (II Cor. 8:9). This grace is absolutely free (Rom. 6:14; 5:15; Eph. 2:8), and it is that which conquers sin both in its penalty and its power (Rom. 5:12-21; 6:1-23). When that grace which was revealed in Christ is received by the believer, it then governs spiritual life by compounding favor upon favor. It equips, strengthens, and controls all phases of his life (II Cor. 8:6; Col. 4:6; II Thess. 2:16; II Tim. 2:1). Consequently, the Christian gives thanks (*charis*) to God for the riches of grace in His unspeakable gift (II Cor. 9:15). Throughout the New Testament, then, the predominant thought is the grace of God in Christ which redeems us, governs us, and gives us everlasting consolation and good hope.⁵

⁴ *ibid*, 31.

⁵ Charles C. Ryrie, *The Grace of God* (Moody, Chicago, 1963), 25-26.

So Who Needs Grace?

Is grace primarily for those who fall into the category of what many might think of as the more egregious sinners? Classifying people into various categories of sinners would normally apply to the self-righteous religious person or the self-righteous moralists who are striving to climb a virtual ladder of good works into the good graces of God. These ladder climbers put a lot of stock in their own good works and focus either on outward behavior or some kind of mystical experience or both. For them, those who qualify as “big sinners” are people who steal, are on drugs, abuse their spouses and children, are guilty of murder, are often drunk and disorderly, are fornicators and adulterers, and the like. In their thinking, “The big sinner needs grace more than I do. I’m a pretty good person. Not perfect, but certainly not evil!”

But are these people accurate about who needs grace? It depends on the standard by which we judge our true condition. Every human being needs God’s grace to the limit no matter how good we may appear to be when compared to others. Naturally, it is better to be a moral person, a good neighbor and citizen, and a decent husband and father than to be guilty of the things mentioned above, but as will be shown from our study, we all are in desperate spiritual condition and in need of God’s grace. When compared to a holy God, we are all wretched sinners in desperate need of God’s grace.

All the World Needs Grace Because All Fall Short of God’s Glory

One of the reasons people fail to realize their true spiritual condition and need of grace is because they make comparisons (themselves or others) with the wrong object or standard. The issue is not how we compare to another or how they compare to us or to someone else, but how we all measure up when compared to God and His incomparable holiness.

Our problem is that we are looking at ourselves through the wrong end of the telescope. We are actually much further from God than we can imagine. The better we understand God, the more convinced we will be that there is no recognizable common moral ground between us and Him. It turns out that we are like the boy who told his mother that he was eight feet tall, at least according to the yardstick he had made!⁶

In the final analysis, when compared to the absolute holiness of God, we all fall far short of His holiness and stand as wretched sinners who are separated from God, spiritually dead and without life (Eph. 2:1, 5), and under the condemnation of the moral Law of God. This moral Law reveals all the world guilty as sinners (Rom. 3:19), as separated from God, and in need of reconciliation and redemption (Rom. 5:10; 2 Cor. 5:18-20; Col. 1:20-22).

The apostle Paul makes this fact clear in the book of Romans. Having concluded his discussion of three types of people, the immoral (1:18-32), the moralist (2:1-16), and the religious (2:17-3:18), he then gives his conclusion regarding man’s condition—all the world is under condemnation and stands guilty before God (Rom. 3:9-20, 23).

In Romans 3:9, Paul first asks a penetrating question and then gives the answer. “What then? Are we (speaking of the religious Jews of which Paul was one) better off (do we have some

⁶ Lutzer, 24.

advantage by our religious works)? Certainly not, for we have already charged that Jews and Greeks alike are all under sin.” As further proof, he turned to the Old Testament Scripture as his justification for this statement that “all are under sin.” Thus, in 3:10-18 he demonstrates the whole of man’s being is under the power of sin—heart, mind, feet (ways), and his speech (portrayed in the pictures of the tongue, lips, mouth, and throat). Mankind has a serious malady. As someone has said, we have been stricken with hoof and mouth disease.

Having given clear proof from Scripture of man’s basic sinfulness, the next step is to demonstrate to whom this applies. The question is simply, is anyone exempt? Is the moral man or the religious man? Absolutely not and verses 19-20 plainly indicts all the world as accountable or liable for judgment.

3:19 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law (i.e., Israel to whom God gave the Law), so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world may be held accountable to God. **3:20** For no one is declared righteous before him by the works of the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin.

But how does the Old Testament Law show the whole world guilty before God? Though God gave the law to the nation Israel, the nation was merely an example of all mankind, a piece of the pie. In order to sample or test the quality of a pie, do you have to eat the whole pie? No. You sample just a piece of the pie because one piece is indicative of all the rest.

With verse 20 Paul demolishes the stronghold of the Jew or anyone who thinks he might be justified by keeping the Law or any rule of righteous behavior as with the Sermon on the Mount or the laws of the Koran. Plainly put, keeping any form of law is not a means by which a person can be declared righteous before God. The Law, whether it’s the Old Testament Law or that written within the heart of man (Rom. 2:14-15), is simply God’s means of showing man his awful sinfulness and alienation from God. As Wiersbe writes:

No flesh can obey God’s Law and be justified, declared righteous, in God’s sight. It is true that “the doers of the Law shall be justified” (Rom. 2:13), but nobody can do what the Law demands! This inability is one way that men know they are sinners. When they try to obey the Law, they fail miserably and need to cry out for God’s mercy. Neither Jew nor Gentile can obey God’s Law; therefore God must save sinners by some other means.⁷

In other words, without God’s grace and mercy we have no hope of obtaining a relationship with God. In terms of our own works or effort or when left to our own abilities, we are like the dead in some horror movie who walk about in the night.

2:1 And although you were dead in your transgressions and sins, **2:2** in which you formerly lived according to this world’s present path, according to the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the ruler of the spirit that is now energizing the sons of disobedience, **2:3** among whom all of us also formerly lived out our lives in the cravings of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath even as the rest... (Eph. 2:1-3).

⁷ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Right* (Victor Books, Wheaton IL, 1977), 32.

But God Has Provide Righteousness by Grace Apart From Human Works

Then how does one obtain forgiveness of sin, spiritual life, righteousness with God, and a relationship with Him? Paul answers this in Romans 3:21-27.

3:21 But now apart from the law the righteousness of God, which is attested by the law and the prophets, has been disclosed— **3:22** namely, the righteousness of God through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ⁸ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, **3:23** for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. **3:24** But they are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. **3:25** God publicly displayed him as a satisfaction for sin by his blood through faith. This was to demonstrate his righteousness, because God in his forbearance had passed over the sins previously committed. **3:26** This was also to demonstrate his righteousness in the present time, so that he would be just and the justifier of the one who lives because of Jesus' faithfulness. **3:27** Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. By what principle? Of works? No, but by the principle of faith.

In these verses Paul gives us a description of the only righteousness that has value with God and which can give us a righteous standing before God (see also Rom. 5:1-2). First of all, this righteousness is given apart from works of law (3:21a).⁹ No amount of works can merit this righteousness. So then, what's the source of this righteousness from God? It is that righteousness which has been manifested in the gospel (3:21b). But we should not be surprised. This is not something new since it is witnessed to by the Law and the prophets (3:21c). It has been anticipated since the book of Genesis (see Gen. 3:15). Furthermore, this righteousness comes to us through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ for all those and only those who believe in Christ since God makes no distinction among people like we do. The reason there is no distinction is because all have sinned and come short of God's glory or His perfect holiness regardless of their evil or good (3:22-23). In addition, this righteousness is by grace as a free gift (3:24a) and by virtue of the redemptive work of Jesus Christ (3:24b). This redemptive work of Christ not only demonstrates God's holiness (His perfect righteousness and justice), but perfectly satisfies the holy demands of God's holy character (3:25b-26).

⁸ Some might take issue with the phrase translated *the faithfulness of Jesus Christ* by the NET Bible rather than *faith in Jesus Christ*. These verses have traditionally been translated "faith in Christ" rather than "Christ's faithfulness" but an increasing number of New Testament scholars are arguing that the Greek construction (*pistis Christou*) and similar phrases in Paul (Rom 3:22, 26; Gal 2:16, 20; 3:22; Phil 3:9) involve what is known in Greek grammar as a *subjective* genitive and means "Christ's faith" or "Christ's faithfulness." Wallace, who notes that the grammar is not decisive, nevertheless suggests that "the faith/faithfulness of Christ is not a denial of faith *in* Christ as a Pauline concept (for the idea is expressed in many of the same contexts, only with the verb *pisteuō* rather than the noun), but implies that the object of faith is a worthy object, for he himself is faithful" (*Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1996) 116. While the apostle Paul clearly teaches justification is by faith alone in Christ alone and does so even in this verse, the focus of this passage is not on our faith, but on the reliable object of our faith because of Christ's faithfulness. It stresses that our faith is anchored in a worthy object—a tremendous assurance for the Christian's faith.

⁹ "Apart" is *choris* which means, "without relation to, independent of, without regard to." The words "apart from the Law" are literally, "apart from law." Since *law* is anarthrous, that is without the article, it may be broader than just the Law of the Old Testament. It may refer to any kind of law whether it is the Law of the Old Testament, the law of one's conscience (2:14-15), or even the righteous principles of the Sermon on the Mount.

So then, no matter how much better one person may appear to be over another, in comparison to God's holiness, he falls short of His holiness and stands guilty with all the world... Apart from grace, we are all on the same road. Some people just slide into the ditch and stay for a while. Others slide in, drag others in with them, and set up house.

Think of it this way. The Sears Tower in Chicago is much taller than the LaSalle National Bank. From our vantage point there is a great contrast between the height of these buildings. But let's suppose we changed the question and asked which one of them was closer to the constellation Orion, which is a few thousand light years away from the earth. Sure, the top of the Sears Tower is closer to this stellar constellation than the top of the bank, but does it really matter? *In the presence of thousands of trillions of miles, there is no appreciable difference in height between the two.*

Don't misinterpret what I'm saying. Of course it is better to be a decent citizen than to be John Wayne Gacy. Of course it is better to be honest than to be embezzling funds at work. From our point of view these distinctions are very significant, and they are also important to God. *But spiritually speaking, even the best of us is still an infinite distance from God.* If we forget this, it is because we have overestimated our goodness and underestimated God's holiness.¹⁰ Clearly, we all need the grace of God in view of every person's spiritual state. "Just as it is written: '***There is no one righteous, not even one,***'" (Rom. 3:10).

The Distinctive Marks of Grace

Grace Is Epitomized in Jesus Christ

As Ryrie has pointed out, "The lavish gift of God in the person of His Son is the particularly New Testament meaning of grace."¹¹ After praising God for the spirit of selfless giving, seen as a consequence of God's surpassing grace at work in the heart of the Corinthians, Paul breaks out in an outburst of praise for the one who is the epitome and root of all God's grace that so wonderfully governs our lives—"Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift" (2 Cor. 9:15). Paul's declaration, "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all people" (Titus 2:11) is a clear reference to the coming of Christ and shows us again that Christ is the grace of God personified; He is the epitome of God's grace.

In the Greek, "has appeared" stands emphatically at the beginning, stressing the manifestation of grace as a historical reality. The reference is to Christ's entire earthly life—his birth, life, death, and resurrection. The verb *epephane*, from which we derive our word "epiphany," means "to become visible, make an appearance," and conveys the image of grace suddenly breaking in on our moral darkness, like the rising sun. (It is used of the sun in Acts 27:20.) Men could never have formed an adequate conception of that grace apart from its personal manifestation in Christ, in his incarnation and atonement.¹²

¹⁰ Lutzer, 39.

¹¹ Ryrie, p. 25.

¹² Frank E. Gaebelain, General Editor, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, New Testament* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1976-1992), electronic media.

Paul also says as much in 2 Timothy.

1:9 He is the one who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not based on our works but on his own purpose and grace, granted to us in Christ Jesus before time began, **1:10** but now made visible through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus. He has broken the power of death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel (2 Tim. 1:9-10).

The gospel message is the story of the life, death, resurrection, ascension, and session of the Lord Jesus. As the personification of God's grace, it is little wonder that in the book of Acts, this message about the Lord Jesus Christ is called "the gospel of grace" and "a message of grace" (see Acts 14:3; 20:24; 32).

Grace Is the Means of Salvation

No truth or teaching in the New Testament is more central than the fact that grace—the free gift of salvation through faith alone in Christ alone—is the means of salvation. Paul wrote, "I do not set aside (nullify) God's grace, because if righteousness could come through the law (i.e., by human or religious works), then Christ died for nothing!" (Gal. 2:21). Thus, the thrust of the New Testament is a salvation accomplished solely by the grace of God as the following will illustrate.

2:8 For by grace you are saved through faith, and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; **2:9** it is not of works, so that no one can boast (Eph. 2:8-9).

1:9 He is the one who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not based on our works but on his own purpose and grace, granted to us in Christ Jesus before time began, (1 Tim. 1:9).

3:4 But "when the kindness of God our Savior appeared and his love for mankind, **3:5** He saved us not by works of righteousness that we have done but on the basis of his mercy, through the washing of the new birth and the renewing of the Holy Spirit, **3:6** whom he poured out on us in full measure through Jesus Christ our Savior. **3:7** And so, since we have been justified by his grace, we become heirs with the confident expectation of eternal life." (Tit. 3:4-7).

Grace Can Be Received

Lutzer's discussion on this issue, which I quote in its entirety below, is outstanding.

Sometimes preachers who should know better speak of receiving God's grace as if we were expected to make a bargain with Him. I have a friend (bless him!) who in his witness for Christ used to tell people to "pledge their allegiance to Jesus Christ." An evangelist gave an invitation and told the people coming forward that they were making a "promise to follow Christ." I shake my head in dismay!

The potential convert is thinking, *If I have to pledge my allegiance to Jesus Christ or promise to follow Him, what will happen if I make such a decision and then break my promise the next day?* Certainly, accepting God's grace will result in a change of lifestyle. But we cannot expect the dead to walk until they are raised and the blind to see until they are healed. Sinners who have never been reconciled to God do not have the power to change their lifestyles, even if they were to get "really serious" about it.

To the person who says, "I want to do something about my broken relationship with God," grace says, "if you really understood the issues you wouldn't talk that way. God did something about

your broken relationship with Him, and the only thing you can do is to humble yourself and accept it!”

Let me be clear. When you come to Christ, you do not come to give, you come to receive. You do not come to try your best, you come to trust. You do not come just to be saved, but to be rescued. You do not come to be made better (although that does happen), you come to be made alive! Augustus Toplady had it right:

Nothing in my hands I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling;
Naked, come to Thee for dress,
Helpless, look to Thee for grace;
Foul, I to the fountain fly;
Wash me, Savior, or I die!

You do not come to Christ to make a promise; you come to depend on His promise. It is the faithfulness of God and not your own that gives the gift of grace.¹³

Grace Is the Opposite of Works

We have seen that grace means the free and unmerited favor of God, but it needs to be stressed that an attitude of legalism by which man seeks to merit God’s favor actually undermines the impact of grace. This is seen in a number of passages which show how grace and human works are opposed to one another.

The first passage is Romans 4:4-5:

4:4 Now to the one who works, his pay is not credited due to grace but due to obligation. **4:5** But to the one who does not work, but believes in the one who declares the ungodly righteous, his faith is credited as righteousness.

Paul states a basic principle in these verses. A worker’s reward or wage is due to him because of his work. A gift, or that which is given on the basis of grace, is totally separate from any form of obligation on the part of the receiver. Justification is given to the one who does not work but believes in the one who justifies.

The second passage is Romans 11:5-6:

11:5 So in the same way at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. **11:6** And if it is by grace, it is no longer by works, otherwise grace would no longer be grace.

Lutzer’s comments are helpful here.

If God’s rescue program had included our efforts, grace would be diminished and salvation would not be wholly the work of God. “But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace” (Romans 11:6). Some things can exist together, but human works and the grace that brings salvation cannot.

¹³ Lutzer, 45-46.

To clear the field for His own activity, God eliminated every work of man—past, present, and future. His action had to be pure, uncontaminated by our own best efforts. He had to act alone. Our self-effort was put on a shelf labeled “Unsuitable for Use.”¹⁴

Grace Is Absolutely Free

In keeping with the fundamental idea that grace is the free or unmerited favor of God, we regularly find *grace* used with terms such as *gift* or *given* or *not of works*. This is surely done in order to stress the free, unmerited nature of God’s grace. In order to stress the impact of this, please note the following passages and especially the words in bold type for emphasis:

4:4 Now to the one who works, **his pay is not** credited due to grace but due to obligation. **4:5** But to the one who **does not work**, but believes in the one who declares the ungodly righteous, his faith is credited as righteousness (Rom. 4:4-5).

11:6 And if it is by grace, it is **no longer by works**, otherwise grace would no longer be grace (Rom. 11:6).

1:9 He is the one who saved us and called us with a holy calling, **not based on our works** but on his own purpose and grace, granted to us in Christ Jesus before time began (Tit. 1:9).

3:4 But when the kindness (*chrēstotēs*, “kindness, goodness, generosity” is here basically a synonym for grace) of God our Savior appeared and his love for mankind, **3:5** He saved us **not by works** of righteousness that we have done but on the basis of his mercy, through the washing of the new birth and the renewing of the Holy Spirit (Tit. 3:4-5).

3:24 But they are justified **freely** by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (Rom. 3:24).

5:15 But the gracious **gift** is not like the transgression. For if the many died through the transgression of the one man, how much more did the grace of God and the **gift** by the grace of the one man Jesus Christ multiply to the many! (Rom. 5:15).

5:17 For if, by the transgression of the one man, death reigned through the one, how much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and of the **gift** of righteousness reign in life through the one, Jesus Christ! (Rom. 5:17).

12:6 And we have different **gifts**, according to the grace given to us.... (Rom. 12:6).

2:8 For by grace you are saved through faith, and this is not of yourselves, it is the **gift** of God; **2:9** it is not of works, so that no one can boast (Eph. 2:8-9).

3:7 I became a servant of this gospel according to the **gift** of God’s grace that was given to me by the exercise of his power (Eph. 3:7).

4:7 But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of the **gift** of Christ (Eph. 4:7).

4:10 Just as each one has received a **gift**, use it to serve one another as good stewards of the varied grace of God (1 Pet. 4:10).

12:3 For by the grace **given** to me I say to every one of you not to think more highly of yourself than you ought to think, but to think with sober discernment, as God has distributed to each of you a measure of faith (Rom. 12:3; see also Rom. 12:6; 15:15; 1 Cor. 3:10; Gal. 2:9; Eph. 3:2, 7, 8).

1:4 I always thank my God for you because of the grace of God that was **given** to you in Christ Jesus (1 Cor. 1:4).

4:7 But to each one of us grace was **given** according to the measure of Christ’s gift (Eph. 4:7).

¹⁴ Lutzer, 36.

Grace, then, is the free and undeserved provision and love received from another; it especially epitomizes the characteristic attitude of God in providing salvation for a sinful world. For believers in Christ, the term *grace* is virtually synonymous with the gospel message of God's gift of unmerited salvation in Jesus Christ and includes everything associated with our life in Christ from beginning to end.

Grace Governs and Empowers the Christian Life

You sometimes hear the accusation that this kind of free-grace breeds license. Part of the answer to the license issue is that grace does not leave us as we were before salvation, but becomes the very foundation for the Christian life (see Rom. 5:1-2). With grace comes the motivation and ability (by God's grace, of course), to produce good works. This is part of the aim of God's salvation by grace as expressed in Ephesians 2.

2:8 For by grace you are saved through faith, and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; **2:9** it is not of works, so that no one can boast. **2:10** For we are his workmanship, having been created in Christ Jesus **for good works** that God prepared beforehand **so we may do them** (Eph. 2:8-10). (emphasis mine)

It should be noted that verse 10 concludes the section begun in 2:1-3 which began with an emphasis on our spiritually dead condition and life under the domination of Satan's world system. This pre-salvation life is a life lived out in the cravings of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and the mind (vs. 3). But now, by God's grace, we are not only redeemed from spiritual death and the penalty of sin, but unto a new life of good works by God's enablement (see also Eph. 4:17-31). This truth¹⁵ is not only stressed in Romans 6:1f in answer to the question, "Shall we sin that grace may abound?" but we find it in the book of Titus where there is a strong emphasis on good works. Note the following:

2:11 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all people. **2:12** It trains us to reject godless ways and worldly desires and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, **2:13** as we wait for the happy fulfillment of our hope in the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. **2:14** He gave himself for us to set us free from every kind of lawlessness and to purify for himself a people who are truly his, who are eager to do good. **2:15** So communicate these things with the sort of exhortation or rebuke that carries full authority.

With salvation by the grace of God comes regeneration to new life, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (our enablement for living), and a new position in Christ which forms the basis for deliverance from the power of sin. The very nature of this salvation teaches us that grace means God has called us to a new kind of life, one that is contrary to godless and worldly desires. Paul even begins his letter to Titus with a similar thrust. He writes, "From Paul, a slave of God and apostle of Jesus Christ, to further the faith of God's chosen ones and the knowledge of the truth that is in keeping with godliness." The good news of God's grace in Christ is a message that has, as part of its purpose, lives that are in keeping with godliness, never license.

Two influential preachers, Charles Spurgeon and Joseph Parker, occupied pulpits in London during the 19th century. On one occasion, Parker commented about the poor condition of

¹⁵ See discussion in the section on the awesome nature of grace.

children admitted to Spurgeon's orphanage. It was reported to Spurgeon, however, that Parker had criticized the orphanage itself. Being a man of fiery temperament, Spurgeon blasted Parker from his pulpit. That attack, printed in the newspaper, became the talk of the town. Londoners flocked to Parker's church the next Sunday to hear his rebuttal. "I understand Dr. Spurgeon is not in his pulpit today, and this is the Sunday they use to take an offering for the orphanage," Parker said. "I suggest we take a love offering here for the orphanage." The crowd was delighted; ushers had to empty the collection plates three times. Later that week, there was a knock at Parker's study. It was Spurgeon. "You know, Parker, you have practiced grace on me," he said. "You have given me not what I deserved; you have given me what I needed."¹⁶

Grace Distinguishes Christianity From All Other Religions

Since works are presented as the basis of God's blessing in all the other religions of the world, grace distinguishes biblical Christianity as unique from all these other religions. Look carefully at their beliefs and you will find man doing something to get God's blessing, whatever that is touted to be.

... There is no division of doctrine that is not related in some way or another—often vitally—to the concept of grace. Inspiration, sin, salvation, Christian living, even future things are but a few examples of related doctrines.

Furthermore, the concept of grace is the watershed that divides Roman Catholicism from Protestantism, Calvinism from Arminianism, modern liberalism from conservatism. The Roman Catholic Church holds that grace is mediated through its priests and sacraments, while Protestantism generally does not. ... Modern liberalism gives an exaggerated place to the abilities of man to decide his own fate and to effect his own salvation entirely apart from God's grace, while conservatism holds that God's grace is necessary for salvation. Man is evolving, according to liberalism, into a kind of superman who is coming to the place where he needs no outside help, certainly not the grace of God...¹⁷

Keeping in mind that Jesus Christ is the manifestation and personification of God's grace, it is the person and work of Jesus Christ and salvation through Him by grace through faith that distinguishes Christianity. In the foreword to Erwin Lutzer's book, *Christ Among Other gods*, J. I. Packer writes:

People with no ear for music say that it all sounds the same, but lovers of Bach, Handel, Beethoven, and Brahms know better. So, too, people who lack spiritual concern or factual knowledge or both tell us that the world's religions are really all the same, and one is as good as another, so that it does not matter which is yours. They also are wrong, however, as Christians clearly see.

The figure of Jesus Christ, as portrayed in the gospel history and shown forth in the rest of the New Testament, is unique. A Man who acted, as Jesus did, like God come in the flesh; who spoke of Himself as the Son of God; who identified Himself as future judge of the world and arbiter of everyone's destiny; who, after being crucified, came alive from the dead, leaving His

¹⁶ From Biblical Studies Foundation illustration database. Author unknown.

¹⁷ Ryrie, 10-11.

tomb and grave clothes empty, and met His disciples again; who, having entered the world by a miraculous conception and birth, and fulfilled in it a miraculous ministry, even to raising the dead, was seen to leave it by a miraculous ascension; and whose disciples for two thousand years have been sure that He actually shares their life, as they share His; why, no other religious leader, and no other religious experience, has ever been remotely like this! As a faith founded on unique supernatural facts, and as a unique, life-changing relationship with its unique divine Founder, Christianity is truly a unique religion. This fact ought to be beyond dispute.¹⁸

According to the 1993-94 Barna research report, nearly two out of three adults contend that the choice of one religious faith over another is irrelevant because all religions teach the same basic lessons about life.¹⁹ But such is not the case. When one compares the record of God's grace to us in Christ with other religious options, investigate His claims, and assess the historical records, biblical Christianity stands out distinct like a huge diamond on a background of black velvet.

What makes Christianity different from all the other religions of the world? Years ago that very question was discussed at a conference. Some of the participants argued that Christianity is unique in teaching that God became man. But someone objected, saying that other religions teach similar doctrines. What about the resurrection? No, it was argued, other faiths believe that the dead rise again. The discussion grew heated.

C. S. Lewis, a strong defender of Christianity, came in late, sat down, and asked, "What's the rumpus about?" When he learned that it was a debate about the uniqueness of Christianity, he immediately commented, "Oh, that's easy. It's grace."

How right he was! The very heart of the gospel is the supreme truth that God accepts us with no conditions whatever when we put our trust in the atoning sacrifice of His incarnate Son. Although we are helplessly sinful, God in grace forgives us completely. It's by His infinite grace that we are saved, not by moral character, works of righteousness, commandment-keeping, or churchgoing. When we do nothing else but accept God's total pardon, we receive the guarantee of eternal life (Tim. 3:4-7). Good news indeed. What a gospel! What a Savior!²⁰

Grace Is Unaffected by the Degree of Our Sin

In some ways this has already been stressed by the passage referred to previously, "where sin increased, grace multiplied the more" (Rom. 5:20), but it is such an important truth it deserves separate treatment because many possess erroneous notions about the salvation offered in the New Testament through the person of Christ. Some think they have been so bad that God could never forgive them. Then, there are those who think that if a person's sins are bad enough (and everyone has their own idea about what constitutes the truly terrible sins), he or she is cast off from God's grace and will lose their salvation. So there are two issues here: the first deals with the nature of one's pre-salvation sins and the effect this could have on salvation, and the second deals with post-salvation sins. In other words, can someone be too bad to be saved, and can someone lose their salvation once truly saved through personal trust in Christ?

¹⁸ Erwin W. Lutzer, *Christ Among the Gods* (Moody, Chicago, 1994), 7-8.

¹⁹ George Barna, *Absolute Confusion* (Regal Books, Ventura, CA, 1993), 15.

²⁰ From Biblical Studies Foundation illustration database. Author unknown.

Pre-salvation Sins

Let's again allow the apostle Paul to speak to this matter first through his argument in Romans 5 and then from his own testimony regarding his pre-salvation condition.

The Apostle's Argument in Romans 5

First, a look at his argument in Romans 5:6-8.

For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. **5:7** (For rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person perhaps someone might possibly dare to die.) **5:8** But God demonstrates his own love for us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

When did Christ die for the ungodly? When they were *helpless*. The book of Romans teaches us that this is not the state of a few, but of all mankind. *All have sinned*—the immoral, moral, and religious alike no matter how hard they may work at being good (Rom. 3:9-10, 23). All are dead in sin and without any ability to save themselves (Eph. 2:1f).

Second, let's again look at Paul's argument in Romans 5:12-21. Here Paul contrasts the universality of sin and the reign of death in the human race with the gift of righteousness through the one act of Christ, i.e., His death on the cross (5:12-17). God's righteousness or salvation is based on the record of one, the Lord Jesus Christ and not our record. But the point that needs to be made here is on the great problem all people face regardless of the depth of their personal sin, namely, the reign of death in all of mankind. "So then, just as sin entered the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all people because all sinned" (5:12); "For if, by the transgression of the one man, death reigned through the one..." (5:17).

Let us suppose that you have two corpses. Is one more dead than another? Does one need a bigger miracle to be restored to life? Fact is, the good person who lives next to you and the criminal you read about in the newspaper are essentially in the same predicament—both need the life that only God can give.²¹

Paul's Own Testimony as to His Pre-salvation Condition

1:12 I am grateful to the one who has strengthened me, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he considered me faithful in putting me into ministry, **1:13** even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor, and an arrogant man. But I was treated with mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief, **1:14** and our Lord's grace was abundant, bringing faith and love in Christ Jesus. **1:15** This saying is trustworthy and deserves full acceptance: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," and I am the worst of them. **1:16** But here is why I was treated with mercy: so that in me as the worst, Christ Jesus could demonstrate his utmost patience, as an example for those who are going to believe in him for eternal life. **1:17** Now to the eternal king, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever! Amen (1 Tim. 1:12-17).

From a history of great religious pride and self-trust, cruel brutality, and unbelief, Paul was brought to faith in Christ and transformed into a servant and teacher of the gospel of grace. Two of the most profound statements are found in verses 15 and 16, the first of which Paul says is trustworthy and deserves full acceptance,

1:15 This saying is trustworthy and deserves full acceptance: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," and I am the worst of them. **1:16** But here is why I was treated with mercy: so that in me as the worst, Christ Jesus could demonstrate his utmost patience, as an example for those who are going to believe in him for eternal life (1 Tim. 1:15-16).

²¹ Lutzer, *How You Can Be Sure You Will Spend Eternity With God* (Moody, Chicago, 1996), 38.

These two verses teach us that in saving Paul, God had a larger purpose. It was a testimony or declaration of God's willingness and ability to save all sinners regardless of how bad they are. Paul became a wonderful example of the saving grace and power of the gospel of God's grace in Christ. Perhaps one of the great lessons here is that no matter how bad people may be, like Ted Bundy, a serial killer who died in the electric chair for his crimes, they are never too bad to be saved by the grace of Christ if they will put their trust in the saving work of Christ.

The word order of the Greek text helps us see Paul's emphasis. Literally, the Greek text reads, "Christ came into the world, **sinners** to save, of whom, first or foremost I am, I *myself*." The emphasis is clearly on the term "sinners" and how Paul considered himself to be the chief of sinners, yet one who experienced the grace of God.

But why does Paul call himself the foremost or chief of sinners? Remember, Paul was an extremely religious man, yet he calls himself the chief of sinners. Perhaps he wanted to make a point about self-righteous religious people. The point is that being religious does not exempt us from being terribly sinful with the ability to commit horrible crimes. The religious bigotry and murderous purges in history bear testimony to the atrocities carried out in the name of religion.

Post-salvation Sins

There are those who view the loss of a believer's salvation to be a real possibility for those who fail in a consistent walk with Christ. The questions that come to my mind when I hear this are: Just how consistent must one be to lose their salvation? What sin, or how many sins cause the loss of salvation? Sin—any sin—falls short of the perfect holiness of God. Every person, regardless of their maturity or relationship with the Lord, is far from perfect by God's standard. We all have things in our lives that fall short of God's glory, i.e., we are never without personal sin, though some may be unknown.

1:8 If we say we do not bear the guilt of sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.

1:9 But if we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous, forgiving us our sins and cleansing us from all unrighteousness. **1:10** If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar and his word is not in us (1 John 1:8-10).

Where, then, do we draw the line? Those who believe we can lose our salvation tend to classify sin as though God overlooks some sins while He judges others. It becomes a matter of degrees and the question arises, "Just how bad must we become before we lose our salvation?" Which sin does us in? What we may think of as sin may be totally out of touch with God's perspective.

There are six things which the LORD hates, Yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: 17 Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, And hands that shed innocent blood, 18 A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that run rapidly to evil, 19 A false witness who utters lies, And one who spreads strife among brothers (Prov. 6:16-19).

Furthermore, if, having put our trust in the person and work of Christ, we can lose our salvation by what we do or do not do, then, in the final analysis, are we saved by works or by our record rather than Christ's record. Believing that salvation can be lost is contrary to the theology of the New Testament (cf. John 10:28-39; Rom. 8:32-39).

No doubt there are millions who have professed the name of Christ and continue to live in such a way which gives no evidence whatsoever that their profession is real. In fact, a widely reported opinion poll survey indicated that over fifty million people in the United States claim to be born again (George Gallup, Jr. and David Poling, *The Search For America's Faith* (Nashville:

Abingdon, 1980), p. 92). Surely, if that many people were true “partakers of the divine nature,” the impact on our country would be profound.²²

There is no doubt that many who profess faith in Christ have never truly and personally trusted in Christ as their Savior. But we must understand that the gospel message is offered unconditionally (i.e. freely) to those who will believe or trust in the person and work of Christ and no amount of failure can remove them from the Father's hand (John 10:29).

And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wants it take the water of life **free of charge** (Rev. 22:17).

For this is the way God loved the world: he gave his one and only Son that **everyone who believes** in him should not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16, emphasis mine).

Naturally, this does not mean there are no consequences for sinful behavior. There are consequences for this life (loss of fellowship, divine discipline, loss of fruitfulness, etc.) and for eternity (loss of rewards [see 1 Cor. 3:12-15; 1 John 2:28])—but the loss of salvation is not one of them.²³

²² Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings* (Schoettle Publishing Co., Hayesville, NC, 1992), 7.

²³ For discussion and arguments on the eternal security of the believer, see Part One of the *ABCs For Christian Growth*:

Laying the Foundation on our web site at <http://www.bible.org>.

Get Ready to Live (Grace – Part 2)

Grace Is Always Under Attack

If grace is so great then, you'd think that everyone would be flocking to accept God's grace. Not so. There are reasons that the way to life is narrow and "few are those who find it" (Matthew 7:14).

Intuitively, we think that we have to have some part in our salvation, to do some work, some deed that will make us worthy of the gift. Some do this by working up a sorrow for sin. Such sorrow is proper and to be expected, but it is not the basis for God's loving favor toward us. Sorrow does not make us more worthy of God's grace. It might lead us to cast ourselves upon His grace, but it will never make us more "presentable."

Someone said to me, "When I become older, I will come to God because then I will be less prone to failure." Whenever you meet a person who talks like that, you know that he has not yet understood grace. He is still thinking that he cannot come to God just as he is.²⁴

But the belief that we cannot come to God as we are to receive the free gift of salvation apart from human works is not new, and because of this, grace and the liberty it give us from legalistic demands has always been under attack. Man has always had a problem with grace and this is quickly seen in the early church in the book of Acts. From the very early days of the church, it has faced the problem of those who wanted to add some form of works to the message of grace. In Acts 15:1 we read these words: "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." Verse 5 tells us that these were men from the sect of the Pharisees who had believed. They were members of the church and so, from within its own ranks, a controversy broke out concerning the exact nature and content of the message of the gospel. Later the apostle Paul had to deal with a similar controversy in the book of Galatians. Writing regarding those who wanted to deny the gospel of grace, Paul wrote, "Now this matter arose because of the false brothers with false pretenses who slipped in unnoticed to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, to make us slaves. But we did not surrender to them even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel would remain with you" (Gal. 2:4-5).

As mentioned, the gospel is by nature a God-centered, grace-centered message. As such, it offers salvation as a free gift, a gift without cost, through faith in God's work through His Son rather than by man's work whether religious or moral (1 Cor. 1:30; John 4:10; Acts 8:20; Rom. 11:6; 15:15-18; Rev. 21:6). The nature of the message, the condition of man (dead in sin and born spiritually blind [Eph. 2:1; 1 Cor. 2:14; John 9:39]), and the activity of Satan (2 Cor. 4:4; John 8:43-45) make this a difficult message for people to accept. People naturally thinks they must add something to their salvation for it to be bona fide. "We simply *have to do* something in order to feel right about it. It just doesn't make good humanistic sense to get something valuable for nothing."²⁵

As a result, accusations are regularly leveled against faith alone in Christ alone. It is sometimes called "cheap grace" or "easy believism." But this is nonsense. The claim of "easy believism," so often aimed at those who preach "faith alone in Christ alone," is a misnomer. Simple faith—

²⁴ Lutzer, 42.

²⁵ Swindoll, 87.

because it is so contrary to the way people think—is not easy for people who think they must add something to the work of God. Furthermore, **salvation in Christ is free, but it's not cheap.** It cost God the death of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thus, the message of salvation as a gift of God's **matchless grace** (see Acts 4:3, "the message of His grace") is described as a treasure or something deposited for safe keeping with which we have been entrusted.

13 Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. 14 **Guard**, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the **treasure** (literally, "the good deposit") which has been entrusted to *you*. (2 Tim. 1:13-14, NASB, emphasis mine).

Here Paul reminds us that this message is both a **treasure** and a **trust**. And what is this message? It is the message about the Lord Jesus that brings men into a vital relationship with the eternal God of the universe.

Obviously, the message that reconciles us to God (John 14:6; Acts 4:12) and gives us eternal life and life more abundantly (John 10:10) is truly a treasure beyond measure; it is a pearl of great value (Matt. 13:44-46). The message of the gospel—often called a message of grace—²⁶ is the most valuable thing a person can possess. But as something so intrinsically valuable, it also needs careful guarding. There were those in the early church who sought to nullify the grace of God by adding some form of human works as a means of either salvation or sanctification. The simple fact is there have always been those who peddle a false gospel seeking to pawn off one of Satan's many counterfeits on a gullible public (Gal. 1:6-9; Jude 3-4).

Our message is the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, the message of salvation through His person and work. That sounds simple enough, but it is not nearly as simple as it sounds. The simple message, "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved," has been assaulted from early on. Since the message is crucial to salvation and since anathema is pronounced on those who misrepresent it or change it (Gal. 1:6-9), we need to know the message and guard it carefully. If we are to be true to the Bible and to the grace of our Lord, we need to be able to share the gospel clearly and avoid the distortions.

Outside the doctrines related to the Person and work of Christ, there is no truth more far-reaching in its implications and no fact more to be defended than that salvation in all its limitless magnitude is secured, so far as human responsibility is concerned, by believing on Christ as Savior. **To this one requirement no other obligation may be added without violence to the Scriptures and total disruption of the essential doctrine of salvation by grace alone.** Only ignorance or reprehensible inattention to the structure of a right Soteriology will attempt to intrude some form of human works with its supposed merit into that which, if done at all, must, by the very nature of the case, be wrought by God alone and on the principle of sovereign grace.²⁷ (Emphasis mine.)

²⁶ See Acts 14:3; 20:24, 32.

²⁷ Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3 (Dallas Seminary Press, Dallas, TX, 1948), 371.

The True Liberty of Grace Versus Legalism and License

As mentioned previously, the marvelous liberty we have in Christ has always been under attack. Either our liberty has been attacked by the legalist who want to inject some form of works for salvation or for sanctification, or, proceeding down a different road, grace has been perverted by those who want to turn liberty into license and this has played nicely into the hands of those who want to add something to grace.

Liberty

In a number of places, the New Testament speaks about the believer's freedom or liberty in Christ, but what exactly does this mean biblically speaking for the Christian? Our ideas about liberty may be skewed by our society. For instance, the first definition given in *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Third Edition* is that liberty is "The condition of being free from restriction or control."²⁸ The first definition in *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* defines liberty "as the quality or state of being free," but then gives the following as the first sub-definition of liberty, "the power to do as one pleases."²⁹ But dictionaries do not provide us with an accurate definition of Christian liberty according to the New Testament.

Liberty is not the power to do as we please or the state of being free from all controls. Speaking from a biblical standpoint, liberty is freedom from slavery and bondage, but included in that is freedom from sin's penalty and its power to dominate one's life, and freedom from Satan's power and that of his world system. Rather than the freedom to do as we please, Christian liberty means the power to do as we ought by God's enablement in accordance with the way Christians have been recreated in Christ. For instance, a train is free to do all it was designed to do only when it stays on the tracks. True liberty means the freedom to be all that we were designed to be, but this is not a freedom that is without restrictions or responsibilities. Plainly speaking, without law, there could be no freedom. The law of the jungle would prevail. Even free men are bound by certain physical laws like the law of gravity.

Peter warns us about those who promise freedom to do as one pleases. Regarding these he says:

2:18 For by speaking high-sounding but empty words they are able to entice, with fleshly desires and with debauchery, people who have just escaped from those who reside in error. **2:19** Although these false teachers promise such people freedom, they themselves are enslaved to immorality. For whatever a person succumbs to, to that he is enslaved (2 Pet. 2:18-19).

Peter also speaks of the proper use of freedom in the context of personal controls and restrictions as servants of God:

2:13 Be subject to every human institution for the Lord's sake, whether to a king as supreme
2:14 or to governors as those he commissions to punish wrongdoers and praise those who do

²⁸ Excerpted from *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Third Edition*, Copyright © 1992 by Houghton Mifflin Company. Electronic version licensed from Lernout & Hauspie Speech Products N.V., further reproduction and distribution restricted in accordance with the Copyright Law of the United States. All rights reserved.

²⁹ *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* (Copyright © 1979 by G. & C. Merriam Co., Springfield, Mass.), 656.

good. **2:15** For God wants you to silence the ignorance of foolish people by doing good. **2:16** Live as free people, **not using your freedom as a pretext for evil**, but as God’s slaves. **2:17** Honor all people, love your fellow Christians, fear God, honor the king (1 Pet. 2:13-17). (emphasis mine)

The governing factor for Christian freedom is the principle or the law of love as those under the law of Christ, but free from the requirements of the Law for either salvation or for holy living (sanctification).

5:1 For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not be subject again to the yoke of slavery. **5:2** Listen! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no benefit to you at all! **5:3** And I testify again to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. **5:4** You who are trying to be declared righteous by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. **5:5** For through the Spirit, by faith, we wait expectantly for the hope of righteousness. **5:6** For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision carries any weight—the only thing that matters is faith working through love.

5:13 For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity to indulge your flesh, but through love serve one another. **5:14** For the whole law can be summed up in a single commandment, namely, “***You must love your neighbor as yourself***” (Gal. 5:1-6 and 13-14).

Legalism

One dictionary defines legalism as “strict, literal adherence to the law or to a particular code, as of religion or morality.”³⁰ As just stressed, liberty is not the absence of restrictions or of law. Under liberty, Christians are under the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2) or as Paul defines it elsewhere, “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:2). Just so, legalism does not simply mean the presence of law. Swindoll defines legalism as an attitude. He writes:

Legalism is an attitude, a mentality based on pride. It is an obsessive conformity to an artificial standard for the purpose of exalting oneself. A legalist assumes the place of authority and pushes it to unwarranted extremes. As Daniel Taylor states so well, it results in illegitimate control, requiring unanimity, not unity.³¹

Ryrie agrees. He writes:

Legalism may be defined as a “fleshly attitude which conforms to a code for the purpose of exalting self.” The code is whatever objective standard is applicable to the time; the motive is to exalt self and gain merit rather than to glorify God because of what He has done; and the power is the flesh, not the Holy Spirit. Legalism may produce outward results very similar to true sanctification, for a legalist is not a non-conformist to the code under which he is living. However, such outward results are at best only counterfeits and can never even approximate genuine sanctification as long as the attitude is legalistic.

³⁰ *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Third Edition*, electronic version.

³¹ Swindoll, 81.

The New Testament is filled with imperatives for which all Christians are responsible. The issue in obedience is the motive and the means: Why are we obeying these commands and by whose enablement? Swindoll adds these helpful comments:

In so many words, legalism says, “I do this or I don’t do that, and therefore I am pleasing God.” Or “If only I could do this or not do that, I would be pleasing to God.” Or perhaps, “These things that I’m doing or not doing are the things I perform to win God’s favor.” They aren’t spelled out in Scripture, you understand. They’ve been passed down or they have been dictated to the legalist and have become an obsession to him or her. Legalism is rigid, grim, exacting, and law like in nature. Pride, which is at the heart of legalism, works in sync with other motivating factors. Like guilt. And fear. And shame. It leads to an emphasis on what should *not* be, and what one should *not* do. It flourishes in a drab context of negativism.³²

License

Basically, license simply means “permission to act” or “freedom of action.”³³ When we receive our driver’s license, we have permission to drive an automobile, but only within or in keeping with the laws of the state. If we are caught breaking those laws, we will more than likely be ticketed and fined. But the term *license* may also be defined as the absence of due restraint, of freedom that is used irresponsibly, or of the disregard for rules and responsibility. License is freedom gone awry in the pursuit of self-centered goals or, as Paul put it, freedom used as a means to indulge the flesh (see Gal. 5:13). As seen above, biblical liberty does not promote license but provides the *motive* and *enablement* for godly living according to the law of Christ and for the glory of God and the love of others.

The Amazing and Awesome Nature of Grace

Grace Is Amazing

In view of man’s condition that all are under sin, not just the immoral, but also the moral and the religious, God’s grace is both amazing and awesome. One reason grace is so amazing to people is their natural bent to work for whatever they get. As previously mentioned, most people have trouble with the idea that grace is something they cannot merit or work for, or that no one deserves God’s blessing in the least. Because of our welfare society this has changed to some degree, but most people still think in terms of working for everything they get and they apply the same principle to spiritual matters.

But we have seen that with God’s grace there are no strings attached. What He gives us comes to us free and clear and this is hard for people to accept. The fundamental reason people have difficulty with this concept is that we are born spiritually blind. Indeed, before salvation we face a double blindness. Because we are born spiritually dead and with that there is a natural blindness or darkened understanding. However, we also face the added blindness caused by Satan’s deception and this especially applies to understanding our own condition and our need of the redemptive work of Christ (see Eph. 2:1f; 4:17-19; 2 Cor. 4:3-4).

³² Swindoll, 82.

³³ *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Third Edition*, electronic version.

4:3 But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing, **4:4** among whom the god of this age has blinded the minds of those who do not believe so they would not see the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God (2 Cor. 4:3-4).

Because of this spiritual blindness, people naturally think in terms of meriting God's blessing. As previously discussed, with the exception of biblical Christianity, if we look deep enough into every other religion of the world we will find that salvation is based on some kind of religious works designed to gain the blessing of God. This blindness or darkened understanding leads to two common errors. First, people fail to see the depth of their sinfulness and so overestimate their ability. Second, because they do not truly know God, they underestimate the impact of God's holiness on their spiritual condition and need. As a result, they operate from a skewed perspective of both God and man.... We see shades of goodness and badness, and as long as we compare ourselves to others, we can be quite confident that we are worthy of God's love and forgiveness.

We've all had that satisfied feeling that comes from doing our "good deed for the day." When we go the extra mile by taking care of our neighbor's children, giving some money to charity, or making an honest deal, we feel smug about our goodness. And when we pick up the newspaper and read about those who kill and steal, we feel pride at how different (and better) we really are. We might even think about how much better the world would be if everyone were just like us.³⁴

But such ideas are contrary to the revelation of God in Scripture. According to the Bible, we all fall short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). Thus, in view of God's perfect holiness and what sinful people deserve from God (His wrath and eternal judgment) and in view of the futility of our works, grace becomes absolutely amazing. The word amazing means "to effect great wonder, to astonish." Some synonyms are "mind-boggling, mind-staggering, surprising." It is no wonder that mankind has trouble with grace because it is simply not something that we expect. It boggles the mind and catches us totally off guard because we naturally think we must do something or have some part in our salvation that will make us worthy. This may take a number of forms—salvation by religious good works, some form of mysticism, some form of religious ritual, or simply by trying to be a good moral person. But Jesus said,

7:13 Enter through the narrow gate, because the gate is wide and the way is spacious that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. **7:14** But the gate is narrow and the way is difficult that leads to life, and there are few who find it. (Matt. 7:13-14).

The narrow gate is the way of grace which is by the gift of salvation through faith in Christ. The wide and spacious gate refers to the variegated paths by which people, rejecting God's one way through faith in Christ, seek to climb the ladder into God's blessing.

Interestingly, in this same passage in Matthew, 7:21-23, Christ refers to those who may have many good deeds, but they are also those who do not truly know Him by grace through faith.

7:21 Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter into the kingdom of heaven, only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. **7:22** On that day, many will say to me, "Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in your name, and in your name cast out demons and do many powerful deeds?" **7:23** Then I will declare to them, "I never knew you. Go away from me, lawbreakers!" (Matt. 7:21-22).

³⁴ Lutzer, p. 24

Even though many may have good deeds and claim a relationship with Christ, unless they have turned from trusting in their own works to faith in Christ alone, they are under the condemnation of the Law as Law breakers. All people break God's moral law and fall short of God's righteousness unless they turn to His provision of righteousness by grace through faith in Christ, as Paul shows us in Romans 3. Doing the will of the Father (vs. 21) starts with personal trust in Jesus as our one and only means of salvation.

6:29 Jesus replied, "This is the deed God requires: to believe in the one whom he sent." (John 6:29).

3:23 Now this is his commandment: that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he gave us the commandment. (1 John 3:23)

Again, it should be stressed that man's difficulty with accepting salvation as a matter of God's grace, as a free and unmerited favor from God, is one of the reasons that grace has always been under attack since the very early days of the church. Several of the epistles of the New Testament are written, at least in part, to protect the amazing truth of God's grace to us in Christ (Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Hebrews are illustrations).

A beautiful illustration of the amazing aspect of God's grace is seen in the experience of Isaiah the prophet. As a religious Jew, Isaiah would undoubtedly have been considered a moral and good man. But in Isaiah 6, the prophet recorded a vision he was given in which he saw the Lord high and exalted. The immediate result of this holy scene was the impact on Isaiah's view of himself and of his nation. He wrote, "Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts." (Isa. 6:5, NASB) Having seen God's awesome holiness, he could see nothing but his own sinfulness and impossible state—at least from the standpoint of his own worthiness to have fellowship with God.

But then we immediately read, "Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a burning coal in his hand, which he had taken from the altar with tongs. He touched my mouth *with it* and said, 'Behold, this has touched your lips; and your iniquity is taken away and your sin is forgiven.'" (Isa. 6:6-7, NASB). This coal from off the altar was either from the altar of incense or the altar of burnt offering. Regardless, the coal stood for the full significance of the Temple ritual of cleansing which foreshadowed the person and work of the suffering Messiah. The point is that by God's grace, God took the initiative to provide salvation and cleansing and, as He did with the prophet, so He has done with us. When the prophet expected judgment, to his great surprise, he experienced God's amazing grace.who is there, (2) who is not there, and (3) the fact that I'm there!³⁵

Grace Is Awesome

In the word *amazing* we have the element of surprise, of seeing that which is mind boggling and beyond our imagination. But in the word *awesome* we have a different element of response. We have that which inspires awe or reverence because of the awesomeness of what God has done. Psalm 103 illustrates this in praise to God's grace.

8 The LORD is compassionate and gracious, Slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness. 9 He will not always strive *with us*; Nor will He keep *His anger* forever. 10 He has not dealt with

³⁵ Source unknown.

us according to our sins, Nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. 11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth, So great is His lovingkindness toward those who fear Him. 12 As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us (NASB).

A few years ago my wife and I drove to Glacier National Park to see this gorgeous mountainous area. It was truly beautiful, but it was on our drive back home that we saw the most awe inspiring sight of all. We'd been through a number of showers and finally the sun broke through the clouds. In our rearview mirror we saw the most enormous rainbow we'd ever seen with the boldest, brightest colors. It was so awesome we stopped the car in order to take a picture, which of course could never do justice to the real thing. The beauty and awesomeness of that rainbow caused us to stop and reflect on this sign which God has given us as a reminder of His promise in Genesis 9.

If properly understood, God's grace to us in the merit of Christ will lead us to stand in awe before God because of what He has freely done for us in Christ. This element is seen in Paul's outburst of praise in 2 Corinthians 9:15, "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift." This statement, an obvious a reference to the Lord Jesus Christ, describes Him as God's "indescribable gift." First, He is described as a "gift," as something man cannot work for, but second, the gift is called "indescribable." The Greek word here is *an-ek-di-ēgētos*. It is used only here in the New Testament and it is a quadruple compound word (ultimately derived from four Greek words, three prepositions and one noun) which shows something of the intensity of the word and of Paul's expression. *An-ek-di-ēgētos* came from the verb *ek-di-ēgeomai*, "to tell in detail, relate, declare fully." The prefixed *an* is an *alpha* negative and negates the basic meaning of the word as with our terms *moral* and *amoral*. The point is clear: words, no matter how hard man may try, simply fail to adequately describe or explain the awesomeness of what God has done for us in Jesus Christ.

God's grace is so awesome that it makes the promise of salvation **certain** because it is not dependent on us or our record but on God's grace as manifested in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

For this reason it is by faith that it may be by grace, with the result that the promise **may be certain** to all the descendants—not only to those who are under the law, but also to those who have the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all (Rom. 4:16). (emphasis mine)

The awesome nature of grace is also seen in the statement, "Now the law came in so that the transgression may increase; but where sin increased, grace multiplied all the more...so that just as sin reigned in death, so also grace will reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 5:20-21). While this passage was discussed previously, it deserves discussion again in view of the awesomeness of God's grace.

Verses 20-21 concludes the argument begun by the apostle Paul in Romans 5:12. Here he shows us that grace is far more powerful than sin. How absolutely amazing and awesome! The overall argument is that grace is stronger and greater than sin. Whatever Adam's sin has brought to the human race (spiritual death, domination by sin, and ultimately eternal death or separation from God), God's grace has brought much more. It has brought the gift of righteousness, a righteousness given by God to believers who shall reign or rule as king over death. This gift of

righteousness means also the gift of eternal life both now and in eternity as well as the ability to reign over sin's domination in this life (Rom. 6 and 8). This awesome grace cannot fail because it is forever. "Not only does he teach that what we have derived from the first Adam is met by what we have derived from Christ, but the transcendence of the work of Christ is almost infinite in extent."³⁶ The reign of God's divine favor (grace) over the reign of sin and death is possible only because of the grace gift of righteousness through the person and work of Christ.

The treatment of sin, death, and salvation in terms of righteousness is crucial to our understanding of our relation to God. It loudly proclaims that no sinner, whether a mystic aspiring to direct contact with God or a legalist counting on his good works to approve him in God's sight, is able in his own way to find acceptance with God. Because another man, Adam, has intervened between him and the Creator, still another, even Jesus Christ, must be the medium of his return as a sinner to a righteous God. The claim of Jesus of Nazareth resounds through the passage: "I am the way—and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).³⁷

"Where sin increased, grace multiplied all the more" (Rom. 5:21). No matter how much sin has impacted the human race and no matter how much we may sin, even as Christians, grace has abounded beyond our sin through the merit of the person and work of the Savior. How absolutely remarkable!! Like a huge mountain range rising up in the distance and towering above the surrounding hills, so God's grace rises above our sin. Where sin abounds, grace much more abounds! Think about it!!

Conclusion

But again we must ask these questions: Isn't this risky? Won't this lead to the abuse of grace in license? Yes, it is risky and some do abuse grace. If that were not true and a clear possibility, Paul would not have said what he did in Romans 6:1f and in Galatians 5:13, nor would Peter in 1 Peter. 2:16. Many, of course, make the claim that a salvation based solely on the free gift of God breeds license and, thereby, cannot be from God. But this kind of response not only fails to stand in awe at what God has done, but fails to properly understand the true nature of fallen man and the nature and purpose of this grace. Grace is God's provision to liberate us from both the penalty and the power of sin.

Paul's teaching in Romans 6:1f follows the statement, "...but where sin increased, grace multiplied all the more" (Rom. 5:21). He knew how the religious, works-oriented person might respond to such a concept of grace. Thus, to meet that objection, Paul asks "What shall we say then? Are we to remain in sin so that grace may increase?" The fact that Paul deals with this issue at this point in the development of Romans and asks this question is clear evidence that the New Testament presents a free salvation (see Rev. 21:6; 22:17). Only a message of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone could lead to the possibility of such a charge brought against it. Preach a salvation that includes some form of works man needs to do and no one would raise the question posed in 6:1.

³⁶ W. H. Griffith Thomas, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, a Devotional Commentary* (Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 1962), 159.

³⁷ Frank E. Gaebelien, electronic media.

Jesus Christ is the preeminent manifestation of God's grace. Since salvation is through Christ, salvation is by grace and every aspect of Christianity is governed by grace. Take away grace or add some form of human works to merit God's favor and you do not have biblical Christianity. The reality is the moment anyone seeks to earn God's favor or blessing, they nullify or reject God's grace as a valid aspect of His plan (see Gal. 2:21; 5:4; Rom. 4:4; 11:5).

The amazing and awesome nature of God's grace to us in Christ is seen in the four reigns Paul described in Romans 5. First, there is the reign of sin (vs. 21) and then the reign of death (vss. 14, 17), but, by God's grace, there is the reign of believers (vs. 17) through the reign of grace through God's righteousness unto eternal life (vs. 21). In Paul's teaching, eternal life is not something we will one day obtain, but a new life with eternal ramifications given here in this life. Thus, the reign of grace includes deliverance over the penalty of sin (justification before God), deliverance over the power of sin (transformation through fellowship with God), and deliverance eventually from the presence of sin (translation into God's eternal presence). So indeed, rather than license, the proper response to grace, as it is developed in Romans 6-8, is emancipated living—lives that are transformed by God's gracious enablement through intimate fellowship with Him by the Spirit of grace.

After the apostle had reviewed his ministry in Asia and given instructions to the elders of Ephesus, whom he had called to meet him at Miletus, he gave them the following words of wisdom that I pray we may all give heed to:

20:32 And now I entrust you to God and to the message of his grace. This message is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

The word "entrust" is the Greek *paratithemi*, which, as used here, means "to entrust someone to the care or protection of someone." The object of the verb is both God and His Word or message, but the message is called a message of grace. It is only this message of the grace of God in Christ that is able to edify, build up, and strengthen us and to enable us to experience the inheritance rewards available to all believers for faithful service.

Marvelous, infinite, matchless grace,
Freely bestowed on all who believe!
You who are longing to see His face,
Will you this moment His grace receive?

Getting Connected (Grace Groups)

Introduction

Grace is a central theme here at Penn Valley. It is such an important and significant topic in the Christian life. It is our conviction that the grace of God is not only necessary for salvation but for the ability to accomplish anything of significance in our lives. We are using the term “Grace” groups with this anachronism:

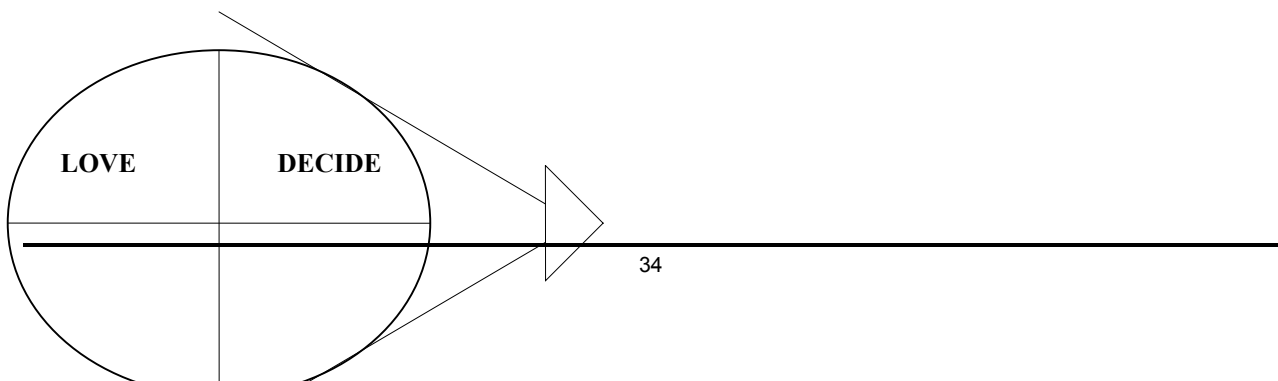
Gratefully
Receiving &
Administering
Care &
Encouragement

The Apostle Paul tell us, “And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work” (II Cor. 9:8).

Purpose and Function

Small groups at Penn Valley are designed to provide a safe environment in which people can develop meaningful relationships and deepen their walks with Christ. Small groups are to be a place where people can gain a sense of connectedness and belonging at Penn Valley, which is not attainable in a large worship setting. They are also designed to be a vehicle for personal growth and the accomplishment of the two primary responsibilities of the church: edification and evangelism.

The purpose and function of small groups at Penn Valley can be understood as a combination of four components which we categorize under the headings: *love, learn, decide, and do.*



EVANGELISM

EDIFICATION

LEARN

DO

The degree to which each of these components are emphasized will vary from week to week and from group to group. However, our primary goals are always to strengthen and encourage those Christians within the group and through the group to reach out to those who are still considering Christianity.

Organizational Structure

Small groups at Penn Valley are organized according to the “Meta Church model.” This model is designed to provide decentralized pastoral care for anyone desiring to be a member of a small group at Penn Valley. We will work to keep the group size from 8-12 people. Each group will be under the care of a small group leader and an apprentice who is being trained to eventually lead a group. Each small group leader is under the care of a member of our pastoral staff. In this fashion we seek to guarantee that the needs of each member of our small groups are being addressed.

Each leader is initially trained by their small group leader as an apprentice. They also will be required to complete a series of special training sessions where they will be brought through a workbook entitled, “The Small Group Leaders Training Manual.” Small group leaders will also receive ongoing training through a (bi-)weekly accountability meeting with a member of the pastoral staff, and a monthly VHS (Vision, Huddle, Skill) meeting. These VHS meetings will be designed to help keep the vision of our church before the leaders, huddling for the purpose of support, and ongoing skills training based on real life situations from the small group meetings.

Some Details

Group Composition - Small groups will vary in composition. The interests, needs, life stages, locations, and schedules of their members are taken into account when forming a group.

Meeting Times - The flexibility of small groups allows them to meet throughout the week in the evenings or during the day.

Frequency of Meetings - Groups will meet weekly or (bi-)weekly from September to June. Some groups may plan special events for the summer months.

Content of Meetings - The content of group meetings will vary according to a groups purpose, but will usually include periods of sharing, singing, praying, socializing, studying, and working on projects together.

Participants - Ministry teams (Leader, Apprentice, Host), regular attendees, and seekers are all welcome to join a small group at Penn Valley and will be placed according to their interests.

How Does One Join a Small Group? - Most people will join small groups by invitation. Group leaders will use the summer months to formulate their groups based primarily upon affinity. Throughout the year, leaders of groups will regularly be given names of interested parties that can be contacted.

The Goals For Grace Groups

Introductory thoughts

Goals are the Ideals that a group tries to accomplish.

All small groups should reflect four basic goals that are fundamental to our corporate, overarching purpose of Glorifying God. [I Corinthians 10:31]

Four Goals

1. Foster Biblical Love. [I John 4:7,11,21]
2. Promote Unity and Fellowship. [Ephesians 4:3-6, 13]
3. Build the Body. [Colossians 1:28]
4. Nurture Spiritual Gifts. [Romans 12:6-8]

* Of all the legitimate ministry contexts a church can offer, small groups provide one of the most practical and ready platforms to successfully nurture these goals.

Comments on Divine Design

- Uniqueness in Creation. [Genesis 1:3-31]
- Uniqueness in Giftedness. [I Corinthians 12:1-31]
- Uniqueness in Calling. [Jeremiah 1:5]
- Uniqueness in Personality/Style. [Matthew 10:2-4; Psalm 139:13-15]

Sharing the Good News (Evangelism)

The Treasure of God's Truth

2 Timothy 1:13-14 Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you.

In challenging Timothy to guard the message God had given him to communicate to others, the apostle Paul defined that message as “the treasure which has been entrusted to you” (2 Tim. 1:13-14). Here the apostle reminds us that this message, the message about the Lord Jesus that brings men into a vital relationship with the eternal God of the universe, is both a **treasure** and a **trust**. Obviously the only message that brings men into the kingdom of God, reconciles them to God (John 14:6; Acts 4:12), and gives them eternal life and life more abundant (John 10:10) is truly a treasure beyond measure or a pearl of great value (Matt. 13:44-46). The message of the gospel is the most valuable thing a person can possess, but as something so intrinsically valuable, it also needs guarding. Why? Because there are many peddlers walking about with a false gospel seeking to pawn off one of Satan's many counterfeits on a gullible public (Gal. 1:6-9; Jude 3-4). But while it is to be guarded, it must not be hoarded. Indeed, it is a message that must be shared or communicated clearly and accurately to others. In that sense, it is also a trust entrusted to us to commit to others. So, in 2 Timothy 2:2, Timothy is charged with the responsibility of entrusting what he had learned from Paul to other faithful men who in turn would teach others and so on, and so on.

2 Timothy 2:2 And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.

This is the ministry of spiritual multiplication. Note that there are four generations represented here. Paul to Timothy to “faithful men” to “others also.” This is very simple, but the results are awesome. If you win just one person to the Lord each year and train that person to walk with Christ and become productive himself, and then the two of you do the same thing with two more people (just one apiece) the next year so that you continue to double your numbers each year thereafter. Do you know how many people would have come to Christ after continuing this process for twenty years? By the end of the twentieth year, your ranks will have grown to 1,048,576.³⁸

¹ Christopher B. Adsit, *Personal Disciple-Making*, Here's Life Publishers, San Bernardino, CA, 1988, p. 332-333.

The Problem We Face

It seems that a lot of people have the idea that making disciples (winning souls and building them in Christ) is a job for only a special cast of people like missionaries, pastors, and youth workers and that their job is simply to support them or pay them to do the work of ministry. There are a lot of things that have led to this like the minister/laymen mentality, but the point is, this is a totally erroneous idea and one that is certainly not biblical. Rather than grasping the concept of every believer a ministering priest (1 Pet. 2:5-10), too many have become simply spectators rather than team players. In other words, 2 Timothy 1:14 and 2:2 give us God's game plan for the body of Christ and most believers can be involved in this to some degree if they were only available. One of the primary roles of the so-called pastor or the pastor-elders is that of player-coaches who train or equip others to do the work of ministry for the building up of the body of Christ (Eph. 4:11-16).

Ephesians 4:12 does not describe three things that the pastors are to do as the KJV might lead some to believe, i.e., "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of ministry, and for the edifying of the body of Christ." The Greek text would be better translated as "For (pros) the equipping of the saints unto (eis) the work of ministry unto (eis) the building up of the body of Christ" (My translation). Paul's intention is to describe an equipping ministry that develops others with a view to ministry which in turn is designed to produce a body that grows qualitatively (spiritual growth toward Christlike maturity), quantitatively (people coming to Christ), and organically (people being plugged into ministries—elders, deacons, teachers, etc.). Becoming good stewards of the treasure of God's truth is not just something for a special few, but a calling for all of us as believers in Christ.

Early Church Growth

After the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ and the coming of the Spirit of God at Pentecost, what happened to the church? It grew by leaps and bounds and with great power. The events are recorded for us in the book of Acts. At first we see just the 11 disciples gathered with the Lord, then 120 in the upper room, then 3000, and shortly after that, the Lord added 5000 more to the church.

This was not simply addition, but multiplication through the ministry of the body of Christ with almost whole communities turning to the Lord and being added to the church, the body of Christ. The growth of the church did not stop there. Through the centuries, the Church of Jesus Christ has continued to grow, and the awesome thing is it has grown among alien cultures, among hostile religions, and among both primitive and cultured and educated peoples. With this growth all over the world, the church has grown and triumphed in spite of traitors, apostasy, persecution, famine, sword, Bible burnings, the lions' den, burning at the stake, and you name it. As the Lord Jesus said in Matthew 16:18, "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock (speaking of Christ's own person and work) I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it."

It is evident that the Church has grown in many different ways, but as Wyn and Charles Arn point out, "... there has always been one way it has grown better, faster, and stronger than any other. From its beginning, through the centuries till today, one unique way has been more

responsible for the Church's growth than any other. It is about this way—and the important implications it has for you and your church”³⁹ that this series on evangelism or making disciples, the great mission of the church, is all about.

The Church Today

The mission for the church has not changed. The mission given to the early church is still the mandate for the church of the twentieth century. Yet things are not well even though the potential for evangelism and discipleship world-wide has never been greater. Around every church and Christian home in every community, there are winnable people just waiting to be won. But, how well do we understand **our mission, the means** available to us, and the **biblical method** that works so well, but is so often ignored?

Statistics tell us that only about 7% of the church are trained to do the work of evangelism and only about 2% are actually doing the work of evangelism. Two men who have considerable experience in evangelism and discipleship and who have traveled all across America conducting seminars, holding consultations, conferring with church leaders and laity, and feeling the pulse of America are Wyn and Charles Arn. In their book, *The Master's Plan for Making Disciples*, they point to a number of characteristics that mark the church in America.⁴⁰

(1) “Reaching non-Christians is a low priority for most congregations and individuals.” What was once the heartbeat of the early church has diminished enormously as a priority in the minds of most Christians.

(2) “The biblical concept of ‘lostness’ has disappeared from the conscience of most churches and most Christians.” We have lost the sense and burden of Jude 23, “others save, snatching them out of the fire.”

(3) “Most evangelism methods are relatively ineffective in making disciples.” Local congregations often “import a program or formula that has seemingly been successful, but in reality, these programs are only short lived. They too often involve a 15-minute gospel presentation under artificial conditions with little knowledge of the person or consideration of their unique needs” (p. 9). Such approaches tend to see people as notches on the handle of their gospel gun. Such approaches often lead to keeping score.

(4) “Evangelism focuses more on decision-making rather than on building relationships and discipleship-making ...” That brief verbal commitment is seen as the ultimate response to the Great Commission. Unfortunately, there is often a great gap between ‘getting a decision’ and ‘making a disciple.’

(5) “Making disciples is interpreted only or primarily as spiritual growth,” but too often it’s a growth that is self-centered and lacks certain elements that are essential to true biblical maturity, namely teaching people to reproduce themselves in others as disciple-makers themselves.

(6) “Evangelism methods are too often simplistic.” They rely too much on canned presentations rather than on building relationships and caring for people as individuals (lifestyle evangelism) that builds bridges to the gospel by genuinely loving people.

(7) “Evangelism is much discussed, but little practiced.” It is a part of the doctrinal statement or on the bulletin, the subject of seminars, and videos, but it’s not really a part of the lifestyle of the average believer or member of the congregation.

³⁹ Wyn and Charles Arn, *The Master's Plan for Making Disciples*, Church Growth Press, Pasadena, CA, 1982, p. 6.

⁴⁰ Arn, pp. 7-11.

So, what's wrong? With the greatest message in the world, a message that gives life in place of death, why are we failing to spread the good news and fulfill the Great Commission? Clearly the church needs training, but more importantly it needs the right motivation to become the people it was called to be, a people proclaiming the excellencies of our God and salvation in Christ.