

THE GOSPEL

FOR CHRISTIANS

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INTRODUCTION

After living passionately for Jesus Christ for some thirty years, planting new churches, testifying about Jesus before kings, and writing the bulk of the New Testament, the apostle Paul wrote some amazing words...

“It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. 16 Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.”

1 Tim 1:15-16

This is the gospel for Christians, that is, the good news that believers everywhere need to hear; God found the worst sinner there was and made Him the greatest saint, in order that all people, everywhere, would gain confidence that Jesus Christ is more than capable to helping me grow. Paul is the model that we are to follow. “Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1). That is, as we read Paul’s writings, he embodies the heart, thoughts, passions, values, relationships, and actions of Jesus, applied to his life. Therefore, as we follow Paul, we follow Jesus. And Paul modeled nothing better to us than His reliance upon God for grace in sanctification.

- *How would you define grace?*
- *How did Paul respond to God’s grace?*
- *Even though he acknowledged his own effort, who did he see as the true power infusing his effort?*

“But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.”

1 Cor 15:10

~ Refer to Discussion Questions ~

The Apostle Paul did NOT respond to a compliment the way many believers do today, "Oh, it's not me; it's the Lord!" While sounding spiritual, that sort of response actually denies that we had any part in our spiritual growth. Paul was aware of his own work, but had depended on grace as the motivation and power of that work. He gave ultimate credit to God while acknowledging his own part. Your choices, your willingness to risk,

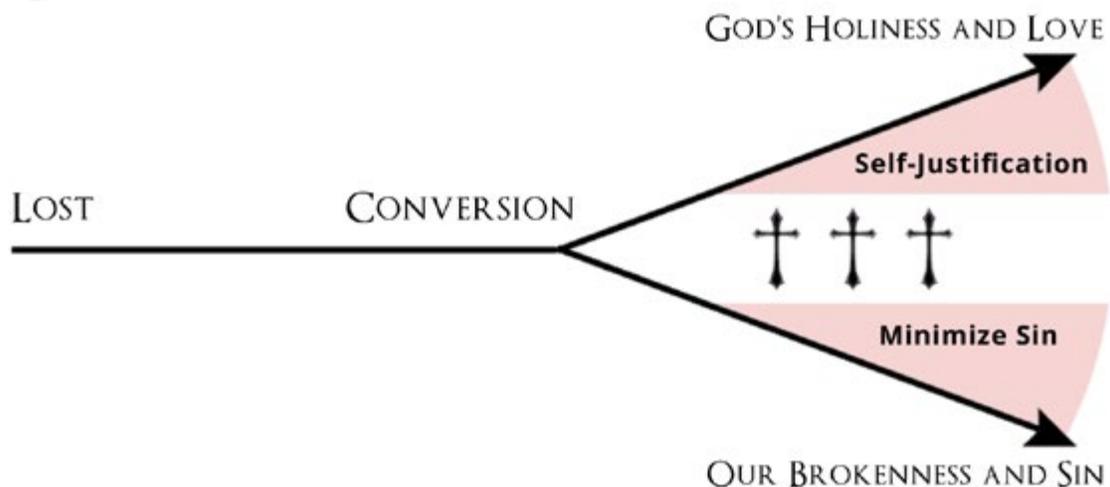
the habits you cultivate matter...what will you do with God's grace?

This study will examine how we make forward progress in our sanctification by actually looking back, then we'll see what simply won't work. Finally, we'll talk about our identity, remembering who we are and where we're headed.

PART 1: MOVING FORWARD BY LOOKING BACK

There is a difference between **saving grace** and **sanctifying grace**. Saving grace is how Jesus paid for our sin on the cross then reached down to save us when we believed the gospel message. It was a one-time event. Sanctifying grace is God reaching down, on a daily basis, to give us the acceptance, power, help, guidance, and motivation that we need to follow Jesus every day of our lives. *We need to live every day the same way that we began our Christian journey, by being aware of our absolute spiritual poverty and coming to God to "save us," to give us the grace we need for today.*

The problem most of us have, when it comes to sanctification, is that we believe that the cross was just for our conversion. And now that we've come to believe, we can move past the cross to other things. Here's how it looks...



Because we tend to think that we're not supposed to struggle with sin, that we really should be over that by now, we end up denying the gospel through (1) minimizing our sin, (2) through self-justification, and (3) through self effort. In other words, I really shouldn't be struggling with sin, but since I am, I must not be trying hard enough. Therefore, I need to hide my sin, justify it, and just work more on my own sanctification. The cross shrinks in our experience because we don't want to admit how truly broken we are. The cross becomes a distant memory rather than the focus of our lives. There is a better way...

A.D. 55 - 1 Corinthians 15:9: "For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God."

A.D. 61 - Ephesians 3:8: "To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ."

A.D. 62 - 1 Timothy 1:15: "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief."

For Paul, the work of the cross did not end with his salvation. Instead, it grew in his understanding, as he daily reflected upon it. The gospel not only saves us, it grows us. As the cross remains the center of our lives, we becoming increasingly aware of our own brokenness and God's daily saving power through grace.

"because of the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel that has come to you. All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth." Colossians 1:5-7

- *What is your response to the illustration of the shrinking cross?*
- *How has minimizing sin, justifying self, and self effort been a part of your life?*
- *What affect might thinking about the cross more have on your life?*
- *What can you practically do to keep the cross as the object of your daily faith?*

PART 2: WHAT SIMPLY WON'T WORK....

The churches in Galatia struggled because they stopped looking back, and instead, they looked to themselves to have the power to become sanctified.

“You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? 2 This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? 3 Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?”

Gal 3:1-3

Notice here that the portrayal of Jesus crucified was intended to motivate an on-going work of the Spirit in their lives. Instead, they attempted to perfect themselves by “the flesh,” that is, their own efforts.

The goal of the Christian life is Christ’s image stamped into everything we do. And that most definitely will NOT be accomplished through our power, our effort, our striving. Instead, **God has placed the Spirit of Jesus to form the life of Jesus within the followers of Jesus.** The flesh simply won’t work. It has nothing to offer, no inherent goodness. *As a result, we are designed to live every day in a state of dependency.* We need the sanctifying grace of God, every day, just as much as we needed the saving grace of God, on the first day of our journey.

“Whether I realize it or not, I am always in deep, acute need of Jesus Christ. Apart from Him, my nets are always empty, my bucket is always dry. It is when I don’t sense that need, when I think I can coast by without Him for a day or two, when I say that my cup is already full--that is when I am in deadly peril.”

Larry Libby

Jesus taught His disciples of their spiritual poverty.

It is imperative that this sink very deeply into our souls. We have nothing good in our flesh that can produce spiritual life. When we truly despair of ourselves, knowing we simply have no power of our own, we turn to God, relying upon Him. We simply cannot produce the life God desires for us through effort or zeal.

“Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.” John 15:4-5

Jesus also taught His disciples of a new power source for their lives.

This scripture is one of the most amazing things that Jesus ever taught. Just hours before being arrested and being crucified, He told His followers to abide in Him, to cling to, rely upon, draw your strength from, and depend on Him. And notice that the result of our abiding in Him is **Jesus abiding in us!**... “And I in you” (verse 4).

The scriptures teach that the Holy Spirit, who is given to every believer at salvation, is the Spirit of Jesus. It is the Spirit of the Son of God who served, who stood for truth, who showed compassion, who loved selflessly that now dwells in every believer. And as a vine has sap that flows out into

its branches, so the life of the resurrected Christ now flows through you. Because of the life giving Spirit of Jesus in us, we bear fruit just by abiding.

Scripture teaches us that God desires that we live fruitful lives.

Through the Spirit of Jesus within us, God wants to produce **the fruit of character**, transforming us from the inside out. Through the Spirit of Jesus within us, God wants to produce **the fruit of godly behavior**, that our lives would be different from the rest of the world. Through the Spirit of Jesus within us, God wants to produce **the fruit**

of good works, spontaneous moments where we simply show love or kindness. Through the Spirit of Jesus within us, God wants to produce **the fruit of knowledge**, a genuine walk with Him, as we know and understand His word. Through the Spirit of Jesus within us, God wants to produce **the fruit of other people becoming Christians** as we share Jesus with others. Through the Spirit of Jesus within us, God wants to produce **the fruit of worship**, as our hearts overflow in gratitude toward Him. Here's the deal: the whole idea of fruit is that the tree is simply plugged into the right sources, receiving nutrients from the earth and rain from the sky. It doesn't strive; it just happens...organically, the way it ought to be.



“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”

Galatians 5:22-23

“for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth”

Ephesians 5:9

“If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me.”

Philippians 1:22

“And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God”

Colossians 1:10

“Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name.”

Hebrews 13:15

- *Do you understand Jesus' illustration of the vine and the branches? How would you explain it?*
- *If the Holy Spirit produces fruit in our lives, what is our part?*
- *How much would you say you depend on the Holy Spirit, on sanctifying grace, on a daily basis?*
- *What would it look like for you to begin to rely upon Him more?*

PART 3-REMEMBERING WHO WE ARE... AND WHERE WE'RE HEADED

- *Who remembers the main points from parts 1 & 2?*
- *Does anyone have any questions from what we've studied so far?*

In the 1920's, Ira Yates was a sheep farmer struggling to make a profit. He was then approached by the Transcontinental Oil Company which convinced him to allow them to drill on his ranch. The company dug four wells on Yates's ranch before they struck oil in 1926. Yates became an instant millionaire. One of the wells set a world record when it produced 8,528 barrels of oil per hour or 204,672 barrels per day. And yet, that was only one of the many wells on his land. The Yates oil wells are some of the most productive of all time, giving a cumulative crude production of 1,180,073,629 barrels over the first 63 years, worth a modest \$4,720, 294, 480.

The tragedy is that many believers live like Ira Yates before discovering oil. God has given us all grace, all power, all the help we need to do all He desires. But by not embracing the truth of what God has given, we live as spiritually impoverished believers, even as we sit on the underground wells of God's grace that is just waiting to pour into our lives.

The problem is that we forget the simple lesson we learned at salvation. We were spiritually impoverished, having nothing. In one moment of time, we became rich by this supernatural exchange that occurred by faith. What happens is that we start by God's power but as time goes by, we stop drawing upon God, and turn, instead, to our own resources.

Let's go deeper into dissecting sanctifying grace, what we need every day. First of all, we can turn from self-reliance to depend on God by remembering the cross. We NEVER out grow of this or move beyond the cross. In fact, as a result of the cross, there are four more aspects God's grace:

Positional Grace -

"I am in Christ."

Indwelling Grace -

"Christ is in me."

Present Grace -

"Christ is present to help me."

Future Grace -

"Christ will one day transform me."

Together, these form our new identity as believers.

Positional grace is understanding that because of salvation, we have been taken out a place of death, or permanent separation from God, and given the promise of an eternity with Him. Jesus made this promise for us when He rose from the dead. He said, "When I am raised to life again, you will know that I am in the Father, and you are in Me, and I am in you" (John 14:20).

Rather than death, we are placed “in Christ.” This is the unending, never-changing status of every Christian. We are eternally united with Jesus; whether we fail or succeed, stand or fall. We are, and will always be, “in Christ.” In the first 13 verses of Ephesians Chapter 1, Paul says no less than 11 times that we are “in Christ,” permanently super-glued to Jesus. If you are a believer, this is your truth. You can confidently say that you are “in Christ.”

”God... has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world... In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins... And he made known

to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ... In him we were also chosen... And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit” Ephesians 1:3-13

Being “In Christ” is a permanent position from which we do not move. It is a position of spiritual blessing, of undeserved favor. We don’t move in and out of Christ, depending on how we do. This is vital to our understanding of sanctification, to prevent us from feeling the need to “perform” our way back into God’s favor. Even if we sin, we sin “in Christ.”

~ Refer to Discussion Questions ~

- *What is the point of the Ira Yates story?*
- *How can that help us in our spiritual journey?*
- *What does it mean to be “in Christ?”*
- *What are the ramifications of being “in Christ” to when we fail, when we struggle, when we want to depend on self?*

Indwelling grace is the reality that being united with Christ means that the One who died for us is now present within us in a way that the Apostle Paul does not hesitate to describe as “Christ lives in me” (Galatians 2:20). The significance of Jesus indwelling us is that we don’t need to trust in our own power if the power of Jesus is at work within us. If you are a believer, you can say, “I am in Christ...And Christ is in me.”

*“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”
Galatians 2:20*

*“For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.”
Colossians 1:29*

“Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.”

John 15:4-5

Indwelling grace means you already have all that you need. We simply need to depend on God in order to experience living His life through us. Jesus alluded to this with His disciples. As our love for Jesus grows, we want to obey Him rather than live self-centered lives. And as we obey Him, God becomes more visible, more “at home” in our lives.

“If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.”

John 14:23

The amazing truth about this is that God’s solution for our sin and selfishness is not rules, not laws, but an invasion of our lives. It’s as if God looks at unredeemed humanity and says, “I can’t fix that. I can only indwell it!”

Like a home, our lives have many “rooms,” many areas, many relationships. We have our jobs, our friends, our marriage, our children, our hobbies, our entertainment. And Christ wants to live through us in every “room,” at all times. This leads us to the Apostle’s Paul’s prayer that we would be strengthened by the Holy Spirit, so that Christ would, indeed, live through us:

“I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.”

Ephesians 3:14-21

J.I. Packer once wrote, “Supernatural living through supernatural empowering is at the very heart of New Testament Christianity.” In other words, God placed the Spirit of Jesus within you because God’s desire to bear fruit that you do not have the ability to bear. We tend to understand Christianity as activities such as reading the Bible or going to church, but the writers of the New Testament understand Christianity as something entirely different:

“The great difference between present day Christianity and that of which we need in these letters (the New Testament) is that to us, Christianity is primarily a performance; to them it was a real experience. We are apt to reduce the Christian religion to a code or at least, a rule of heart and of life. To these men, it is quite plainly the invasion of their lives by a new quality of life altogether. They do not hesitate to describe this as Christ living in them. Perhaps if we believed what they believed, we would achieve what they achieved.”

J.B. Phillips

- *Have you heard before about Christ indwelling believers? If not, how does that make you feel? If you have, would you say you live as if Jesus actually indwells you? Do you even think that way?*
- *Comment on the illustration of the home. Can you see a tendency to keep Jesus only in certain rooms? What words would you use to describe “what could be,” that is, what could happen in your life because of indwelling grace? What words does Paul use to describe this in Ephesians 3, alluded to above?*

Present grace is the understanding that because we are in Christ and Christ is in us, He is always there to help us; today, right now, whenever we depend on Him. As we turn our hearts to get refreshed, replenished and refocused, God will give us the perspective, motivation, desire, passion, strength and all the grace we need to face any of life’s difficulties. If you are a believer, you can say, sing or shout that Christ is present to help. Notice the words Paul uses below to emphasize present grace and its unwavering place in our lives...

“And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed” 2 Corinthians 9:8

However, present grace will not be experienced as much by those who rely upon themselves. God gives grace in relation to our dependency on Him.

So, it’s critical to see that grace is how we begin our journey with Christ AND how we progress every day. We do not begin by God’s grace, then perfect ourselves through self-effort. Instead, we rely upon Jesus as the constant source of the grace that we need every day. Tim Keller put it this way...

“Belief in the gospel is not just the way to enter the kingdom of God; it is the way to address every obstacle and grow in every aspect. The gospel is not just the ‘ABCs’ but the ‘A-to-Z’” of the Christian life... All our problems come from a lack of orientation to the gospel. Put positively, the gospel transforms our hearts, our thinking and our approach to absolutely everything.”
Tim Keller

The sad reality is that we don’t want to relate to God as spiritual impoverished people who bring

nothing to the table. We'd rather come to God, depending on our good works, or on our wisdom, our competency, our drivenness. This is why "good works" is so appealing to many, as the way to salvation, because it magnifies us, rather than magnifies Jesus. We were made for good works, but as the product of our relationship with Jesus, NOT a way to win God's favor. Good works are not what we prepare for God; they are what God prepares for us.

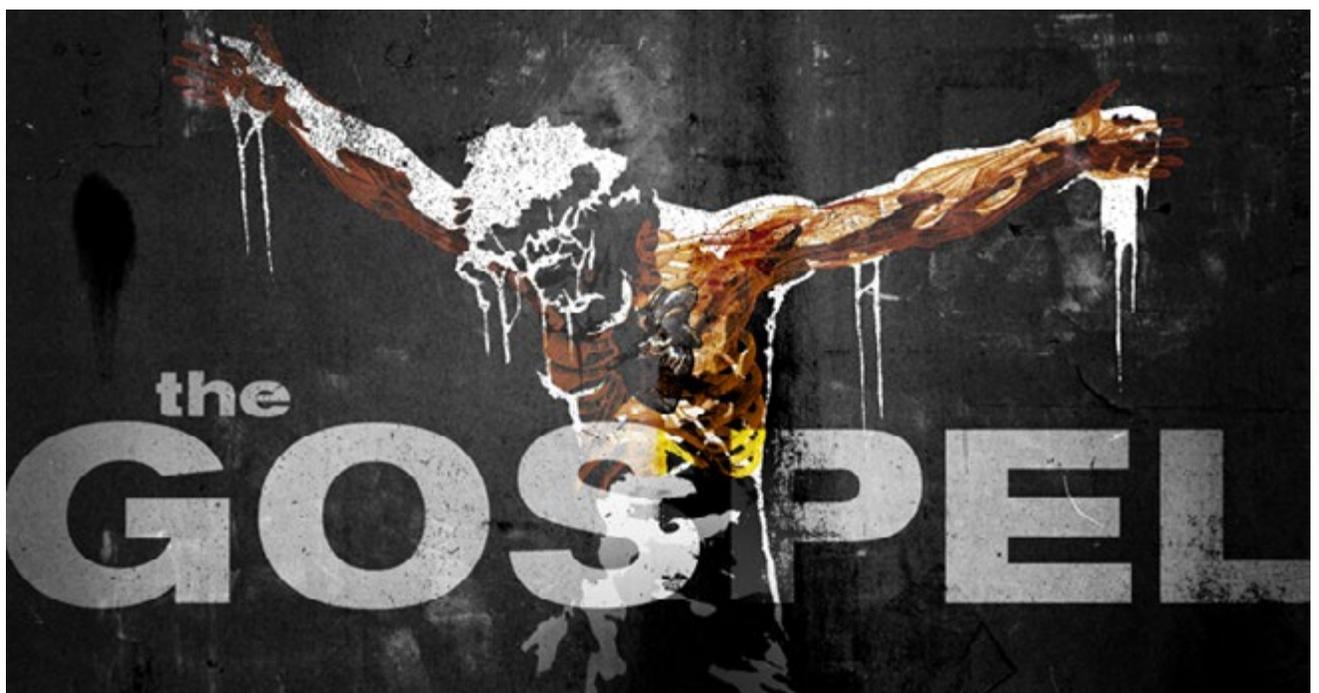
"I myself have been preaching and cultivating the message of grace for almost 20 years and still I feel the old clinging dirt of wanting to deal so with God that I can contribute something so that He will have to give me His grace in exchange for my holiness. Still I cannot get it into my head that I must yield myself to sheer grace, yet I know this is what I should and must do."
Martin Luther

"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His

workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them." Ephesians 2:8-10

Future grace is the reality and understanding that because we are in Christ and He is in us, we know that He will return one day to complete His work of transforming us into His image. Jesus will change our bodies through a process called glorification so that we will no longer struggle with sin. His plan of salvation for us will then be complete. No matter how you do on this earth, no matter how messy or unfinished you feel you are, God will finish the good work He has begun. If you are a believer, you can say with confidence, "Christ WILL one day transform me."

"For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself." Philippians 3:20-21



SUMMARY

In this study, we've talked about our tendency to leave the cross behind, as if we've grown beyond it, leading us to experience "the shrinking cross." We've talked about how self effort simply will not be successful in bringing about our transformation into the image of Jesus. And we've talked about four aspects of God's sanctifying grace, specifically, (1) positional grace, (2) indwelling grace, (3) present grace, and (4) future grace. It is in the light of this study about God's grace that perhaps we can get just a glimpse of the power and presence of God to work in our lives...

"Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, 21 to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen."

Ephesians 3:20-21

ACTION POINT

1. C.J. Mahaney said, "Reminding ourselves of the Gospel is the most important daily habit we can establish. If the Gospel is the most vital news in the world, and if salvation by grace is the defining truth of our existence, we should create ways to immerse ourselves in these truths every day. No days off allowed. . .Your audience is your own heart.

And the message is simple: Christ died for you sins. It's a matter of sitting down, grabbing your own attention, and telling yourself, "Hey, listen up! This is what matters most: You're forgiven! You have hope! Your hope is based on the sacrifice of Jesus. So lets' not view this day any other way. Let today be governed by this one defining truth."

What practical steps can you take, from this day on, to remind yourself of the gospel for Christians?

2. Incorporate the scriptures included in this study into your prayer life.