

Prologue

Why another book on the grace of God? In a nutshell, here is the reason why, God's redeeming grace is very often separated from sanctification in the minds of many believers. In reality, justification and sanctification are joined like two sides of a coin, and are meant to operate together. When justifying grace operates in tandem with sanctifying grace, a certain life-transforming dynamic is present which we have designated, "grace-driven" or "gospel-driven" sanctification. This dynamic of grace-driven sanctification fills the New Testament epistles. It is our sentiment at Gospel for Life that the church of Christ today is weak primarily because it is weak on the gospel of God's sanctifying grace in Christ.

Life under grace means learning to live upon Another, upon Christ our Savior and "Source Person." The embattled saint needs frequent 'views' of Christ in order to begin to truly understand the infinite resources at his or her disposal. It is for this reason that we must be gospel-centered; for the gospel displays to the eye of faith the perfect suitability and sufficiency of Christ for every need the believing sinner has (Col 2:1-10).

It is our goal that this resource would be a tool in the hands of the Holy Spirit to more fully familiarize believers with their infinite riches in Christ. How we need to investigate our wealth in the Lord, for the gospel is utterly counter-intuitive. It is opposed to the works-law 'religion' we inherited from Adam. The gospel comes bringing everything we need to be accepted by God Almighty, for in Christ we have a perfect God-approved righteousness imputed to us by faith. Scripture refers to this as *justification* by faith through grace (Rom 3:24).

God's gracious act of justifying believing sinners flows from the satisfaction of divine justice accomplished by Christ's redemptive work on our behalf. However, what is frequently missing in the thought of many sincere believers is an understanding of how justification and sanctification are joined in their goal to conform the believer to Christ. Our goal at Gospel for Life is to help Christians understand how the gospel functions in the sanctification of the believer. One theologian, searching for simplicity expressed the relationship in this manner, "Sanctification means taking one's justification seriously."

How true this is—treasuring our justification in Christ produces holy living. Divine grace does not function merely as a kind of boarding pass to conduct the Christian past heaven's security checkpoint. God's grace received is anything but static—instead it is powerful, dynamic, energizing, and transforming. Our premise in this workbook is that when the sinner becomes the object of God's redeeming grace there is a radical grace dynamic unleashed that begins to operate in person's life.

The reception of saving grace affects concrete changes and it sets in motion a new set of values and behaviors (2 Cor 5:17). Grace received renews us; it makes us God's possession; it grants us a new desire to know God; it plants in us a passion for God's glory; it causes us to long for good works; it sets us warring against indwelling sin; and it transforms our relationships. This is but a partial list of the guaranteed effects of transforming grace.

Our common problem is that we all too often resign ourselves to a graceless form of Christianity that does not depend upon supernatural resources. By 'graceless' I mean that we settle for behaviors which can be performed in our natural strength. It reminds me of the story of the boy who filled the side of a barn with arrows. When the farmer saw the side of the barn, he exclaimed in

amazement, “Why every arrow you fired is in the bull’s eye of a target!” “How in the world did you accomplish that feat?” The boy answered, “It wasn’t that difficult, after I shot the arrows, I drew the targets.” In many ways this illustrates graceless Christianity, we settle for a standard which can be accomplished in our own strength.

The grace dynamic reverses this fleshly trajectory. For grace living tells us that in Christ we have been given everything pertaining to life and godliness. What is impossible in the flesh is possible through the grace of Christ. It requires the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit in order to love God and the brethren as ‘Christ has loved us’. The Apostle Paul lived by *faith in the Son of God* (Gal 2:20).

So why is it then that so many Christians live as if they are stranded on a desert island of performance? The answer is that apart from being ‘saturated’ with the gospel, we tend to forget that our standing with God is carried by Christ. Once we forget that in Him we have perfect acceptance, favor, and status; we will tend to approach the Christian life from the faulty motive of achieving in order to be accepted by God.

The glorious gospel conquers this mindset by proclaiming to us that the true basis and foundation for our good works is the finished work of Christ. Therefore, the more regard we have for the matchless work of Christ on our behalf; the more our motive for good works will emerge from a posture of overflowing gratitude (Col 1:6-7). To be utterly smitten with the sufficiency of Christ’s work for us provides the incentive to abandon ourselves to God as His grateful servants. Luther reminds us that this is the only proper motive for service, “The believer’s deeds of mercy are aroused by the works through which Christ has saved us.” Thus, the proper impetus for doing good works issues from an abiding awareness of the completed work of Christ on our behalf.

Christ’s righteousness imputed to us is complete in itself—we cannot add to it. Our efforts at service, ministry, and sanctification can do nothing to enhance our position before God because it is already perfect in Christ.

As you explore this workbook, you’ll quickly notice that living upon blood-brought grace makes a believer active for God (Titus 2:14). The grace-motivated believer lives a God-ward life in which he or she is consciously *offering themselves back to God* each day. God has already taken possession of us at the moment of salvation; now it is our reasonable service of worship to daily present ourselves to Him as a living sacrifice. Thus the grace of God in the gospel has become our ‘rationality’ to give ourselves back to God as an ongoing lifestyle of *presenting our members to God* (Rom 6:11-14). This is where real usefulness, sanctification, and transformation take place. Through this glorious dynamic of grace-driven sanctification, our progress in knowing the God of covenant love, mercy, and faithfulness increases as we learn to live upon Christ and His grace.

So many believers today are not tasting the goodness of the Lord as they could be. The reason why is because they are paralyzed by the guilt which issues from their shortcomings and failures. As a consequence of living under a cloud of condemnation, they lack a passion for the glory of the Lord. God’s solution is ever the cross of Christ—let us never forget that our wretchedness, pollution, and rebellion were not a barrier to God sending Christ for us—and yes, sending Him for the worst things about us, that He might bring us all the way to God. It is our prayer at Gospel for Life that countless believers will be helped by this book. We long to see Christ’s church living upon her Lord and entering into the ‘shared life’ with Him which He has purchased for her.

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