Growing in the Grace of God

By
Bob Hoekstra

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# Growing in the Grace of God

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Growing in the Grace of God

Lesson 1
The Law of God

By
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Opening Prayer

Father, we thank You so much for the great love You have for us—for the love that is proven and offered to us through Jesus Christ. We thank You for Your Word and its great truth and power. We thank You for Your Holy Spirit who guides us into all the truth. And we ask You now, by Your Spirit, to unfold for us these glorious avenues of the grace of God and teach us what that grace is to mean both in and through our lives.

We come in eager humility, with hunger and need, seeking You, Lord. Thank You for Your great promise that whoever believes in You would not be disappointed. So it is that we anticipate joyfully all that You want to do in this time of study. And we commit it to You for Your work. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Introduction

This December will be thirty years since I met the Lord. The twenty-five years before that, I must say, are a very sad tale. But this side of Christ, life has been increasingly blessed, rich, and encouraging. And now for twenty-eight years plus, the Lord has let me teach His Word and I have come to love its teaching.

The theme in the Word of God that I most love to teach about—and that which I believe is the primary theme in Scripture—is simply this: the Lord Jesus Christ. Thinking about the Lord Jesus Christ leads one to recognize His number one characteristic: the grace of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. I love to teach on the grace of God.
In fact, for three consecutive quarters, I have been teaching a college course called *Growing in the Grace of God*. Twelve weeks, two hours a week, twenty-four hours on this tremendous theme. And I have never enjoyed teaching the Word of God more in my life than I have in these last three quarters.

However, even in twenty-four hours, I feel like still we are just scratching into the topmost layers of the depths of the grace of God. I have been praying for some time that the Lord would let me offer this as a six-hour seminar. And the time is now. And the place is here. And we are going to study about growing in the grace of God.

**By way of introduction, Romans 6:14.**

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

In relating to God and developing a life with God, Christians do such under the terms of grace and not under those of law. Grace *not* law. We develop a relationship with God and a life in the Lord by God’s grace—that is, we do so by His provisions for us, and His work in and through us. We do not develop all that He has for us through the terms of law—that is, we cannot cultivate our life in the Lord by trying to live up to the rules and regulations of Almighty God by our own best ability.

**Galatians 4:21, by way of introduction.**

Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law? (Gal 4:12)

The natural inclination of virtually every Christian—once he comes to belief, once he becomes a Christian through faith in Jesus Christ—the natural inclination born out of his heart’s fondest
desire to please and serve God is to consider that service to the Lord. The Christian naturally
operates as if everything hinges upon how well, how fully, and how completely he serves the
Lord God, our Savior. As Christians we are inclined, naturally, to live under law.

God says, “Do it.” We want to do it. God says, “Do not do it.” We do not want to do it. God says,
“Here is My standard.” We want to live up to it. We just naturally start out there. Plus, that is the
way we learn to live anyway: “Hey, you can do it! Hey, it’s in you! Come on, you’ve got to do it.
If you do not, who will?” If this is the case, we have left God out of the formula. And glorious is
the truth when we at last begin learning more and more to live by the grace of God—to grow in
and by the grace of God.

Those who want to live under the law (virtually every Christian at the beginning—at least
unwittingly so) do not really hear the law’s radical message. They neither know what the law
truly says nor are they aware of the inability of the law of God.

Henceforth we shall look at four things. Concerning the law of God, we are going to learn of its
message, its inability, its ability and its fulfillment. Now, this might seem like a strange place to
begin in a six-course study on the grace of God. But the relationship between the law of God and
the grace of God is strategic. Do you know where our appreciation for the grace of God really
grows and develops? It comes only as we understand the law of God.

This first class will be called, The Law of God. And throughout, we shall be increasingly ready
and hungry to study that grace; because though the law of God is glorious in its own right, its
primary purpose is to whet our appetites for (and show us our desperate need for) the grace of
God.
The Message of the Law of God

First, we shall discuss the message of the law of God. By the law’s message, we mean what it says. Or more importantly, we mean what God is saying through the law. Leviticus 19 summarizes God’s statement of the law of God. It is right here in the first five books of the Bible, which discuss primarily the law of God.

1And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2“Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy. 3Every one of you shall revere his mother and his father, and keep My Sabbaths: I am the LORD your God.’”

(Lev 19:1-4)

Some of the commandments of God are given here: stay away from idols; treat your parents properly and with respect; and honor the Sabbath. And then all is summarized in two words: “Be holy.” A two-word summary of the whole law of God is “Be holy.” Why? Because God is holy. So then, how holy do we have to be? Obviously, we must attain a holiness that will measure up to a holy God. Basically, we must be as holy as God Himself. This passage from Leviticus is quoted and repeated directly in 1 Peter 1:15,16—where we are told again to be holy. And again it says, to be holy “for I, the Lord your God, am holy.” In the Old Testament and in the New Testament, God is holy. God is still holy. God is always holy. He always was, He always will be, and He is today. Be holy. We serve a holy God and the law tells God’s people to be holy like just as God is holy.
Matthew 5 offers another amazing summary of the law of God. Much of the Sermon on the Mount, from where this verse is drawn, speaks of the law of God. We shall touch on that later. In fact, Christ’s famous sermon is the law of God intensified. This great summary of God’s law comes in Matthew 5:48:

Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect. (Mat 5:48)

Another two-word summary of all the law of God is this: be perfect. We might ask, “How perfect?” After all, the saying goes, “nobody’s perfect.” How perfect? How perfect must we be? Read carefully. “As your Father in heaven is perfect.”

The message of the law of God is thus: be as holy as God if you want to relate to Him—be as holy as God if, by your best effort, you wish to measure up to His commands and standards. The message of the law of God is that if one wants to relate to a perfect God through his performance before His standards and laws, then there is one thing that person must be: perfect.

What about the saying, “Nobody’s perfect”? Yeah. It is true and it means that everybody is in trouble. Be perfect. Be as perfect as your heavenly Father is. Note well: the law does not say, do your best (because after all, what more could God expect of you?). The startling fact is that God, through His law, demands far more of us than just our best. Our best is not perfect holiness. Our best is not perfection like God Himself. And remember, “Be holy as I am holy.”
So many of us have always behaved before the law as though God graded on a curve. “Oh, I’m going to do the best I can. And thank God, it looks like it’s better than sHe is doing. Or at least better than He is doing. And maybe I’ll at least get a C-minus in glory. At least I’ll pass.”

That is not what the law says. And the fact that many seem to want to live under the law by their own best effort—thinking they are going to please God—demonstrates how little they understand the law. By their own best effort they are going to get into heaven. By their own best effort, once saved, they are going to be fruitful and effective Christians.

Galatians 4:21 responds: “You want to live under the law? Do you not hear what the law is saying?” You want to relate to God on your own best effort before His commands and demands? Okay, then let us summarize it for you in two words twice. Be holy. Be perfect. How holy? As holy as God. How perfect? As perfect as God. That is the message of the law of God. May we not water it down. May we not make it to be less than it says. Because if we make it to be less than it says, we are not letting it fulfill the work that it is able to do in our lives.

**The Inability of the Law of God**

Before we look, though, at the ability of the law of God, next we are going to look at the inability of the law of the God. We must see what the law of God cannot do before we can comprehend what it does have power to do. Now beware—these are not my opinions about the law of God. When we talk about the inability of the law, our first reaction might be along the lines of, “Who are you to talk like that about the law of God? The law of God is not able?” The law of God is able to do what it was intended to do. It is not able to do what it was never intended to do.
Hebrews 7:18-19 speaks to us from God Himself concerning the inability of the law of God. There is a divine inability of the law of God; there’s a built-in weakness—and not one of God’s oversight. It is not as if God gave the law and then people tried to obey, failed, and He recants saying, “Oh, I just have to make it different next time around.” No way. God has never made a mistake and never will. He knew exactly what He was doing with the law. And He knew it had an inability and created it that way.

18 For on the one hand there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness

19 for the law made nothing perfect; on the other hand, there is the bringing in of a better hope. (Hbr 7:18-19)

A better hope than the law! We’ll look at that extensively further down. “There is the bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God.” You want to come close to, to get to know, to walk with, to live with a holy and perfect God? You need a better hope than the law of God.

There is a better hope. It’s called the grace of God. And it is by which that we do draw near to God.

Here then is the inability of the law. It has a weakness, God says. The law made nothing perfect. Now think about that for a minute. The law of God demands perfection. But the law of God cannot provide perfection. This should not worry us for the Lord has another way to provide what
the law demands. But we get ahead of ourselves. But the law has this inherent inability: though it
demands perfection, it cannot provide it.

In the area of justification—as well as sanctification—the law cannot provide what is needed
before a holy and perfect God. Justification (the beginning of our new life with God) and
sanctification (growing and maturing with God): these are experiences foreign to the work of the
law. The law makes nothing perfect, neither in the area of justification nor sanctification.

Galatians 2:16 emphasizes the fact that the law cannot justify. Notice how this verse works
backwards and forwards two or three times. It portrays a contrast between how we are justified
and how we are not justified. Before reading it, remember that justification means being declared
innocent, not guilty—and that the one declaring it is the holy, perfect, righteous Judge.

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

It’s a pretty strong verse, isn’t it? It just works it back and forth. From one angle: only by faith,
not by works of the law. And then from the other: not by works of the law, only be faith. Why?
Justification simply cannot come by works of the law. Okay Lord, I think we are getting the
point. No one will be justified by works of the law.
In other words, God gives us His holy standard. And no one, by their own work attempting to live up to the law’s demands will come to that point where God says, “Come on. Come on. Just one more step. Okay! I declare you innocent. Not guilty. No sin. You’re righteous.” Who are we kidding? If we did not know the many passages that tell us otherwise, we are already convicted inside with our own inability to walk in perfect obedience and righteousness—even on our own best effort before God.

But then, how are we justified? How do we get declared innocent? Not guilty?Forgiven? Simply this: we are justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law.

So the law cannot save us. It cannot give us a perfect standing before a holy, righteous, and perfect God. We should now understand that issue. The law cannot justify. If we are reading this and interested in the subject of Christian grace, we are probably Christians. We have been justified by faith in Jesus Christ. We have finally admitted that we are not going to earn heaven by our labors under the law. We could not enter into God’s family on our own best effort to live up to His standards. And so we have plead, “Mercy! Grace!” In repentance we asked for forgiveness and new life. And we were justified by faith in Jesus Christ. No one can be a Christian unless they understand it is not by works of the law, but only through faith in Jesus Christ that men are saved.

Here we shall presently look at sanctification, the Christian’s living and growing and maturing and serving and being fruitful. In fact, over the next six classes, we are going to concentrate mostly in the area of sanctification because we are looking at the subject growing in the grace of God—not just being saved by the grace of God.
As the law cannot justify us, neither can it sanctify us. Let's look at Galatians 3:2 and following.

This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? (Gal 3:2)

Now, is that a verse about justification or sanctification? Is that a verse about starting out with God or growing up with God? It is a verse about starting out with God. It’s a verse about justification.

Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law or by the hearing of faith? If you are a Christian, the Holy Spirit is in your life. If the Holy Spirit is not in your life, you are not a Christian. 1 Corinthians 13 says, if we have not the Spirit we are none of His. The Spirit lives in a Christian. The Spirit brings that new life of Christ in us. How did we receive that? How did we start out? How did we get the Holy Spirit in our lives letting us be born again by the Spirit of God? Was it by works of the law or by hearing of faith? Was it by trying our hardest to live up to the law and the works of the law until God said, “Oh, you are doing so much better than everyone else. I just cannot hold My Spirit back from you any longer”?

Really? That is not why we are here. That is not how I got the Spirit. No one could get the Spirit that way. It was by the hearing of faith. We heard we were sinners and we believed it. We heard Christ died for us and we believed it. We heard He would forgive us if we would call upon His name and we believed Him. The Spirit came into our lives by the hearing of faith.

Now follow the immediate transition in verse 3 to sanctification—to a life proceeding day by day with Christ.
Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh? (Gal 3:3)

Oh, what a question that is. Having begun with God, having started out with the Lord, having found new life and a new birth by the Spirit, are you now growing up, being made perfect, maturing, being sanctified, being made more and more like Christ by the flesh? Are you so foolish? I was. I have met very few Christians who were not that foolish. We all start out that foolish, I think. “Thanks, God, for bringing me into Your family. New birth. Justification. Oh wow, watch this. I love You. I want to bless You. This is all for You, Lord.” You go out and stagger and stumble. You try to hit. And you miss.

Are we so foolish, having begun in the Spirit, are we now growing up in the things of God by the flesh? Are we by human effort attempting to live up to the standards of God? Are we that foolish? Maybe you are that foolish.

And I do not say that in any condescending or self-righteous way, because that is exactly where I was. The first three years as a Christian, I know I was that foolish. But you know what? After three years a believer, an amazing thing happened to me. We had a little Bible study group in our home in Dallas where I was studying at Dallas Seminary that began as three couples who simply wanted to gather for prayer. And it kind of grew to a dozen couples. And then they wanted to hold public meetings. And the next thing I knew, I was a pastor. Three years after I was saved and I was a pastor. Talk about staying one week ahead of the hounds! Every week I learned everything I knew and told it all. And then I prayed for another week to do it again. Of course, I was the oldest man in the church. I was twenty-nine years old, you know.
For four or five years I was still so foolish as a pastor—believing that having begun in the Spirit, I could be perfected in the flesh. Oh how I preached the law to those dear saints! The strange thing was: they loved it. They loved hearing the law preached—just like I did when I started out.

We were just like Israel. “All that you have said we will do.” The entire history of Israel in the Old Testament is the story of just how they responded to that which God asked of them. We are to learn from these things. We do not have to go through all of it by personal failure in order to learn. Of course we will have plenty of failures to aid our learning, but we can still learn something from those who passed before us. We are told in 1 Corinthians 10 that the history of Israel was written for our admonition. So we can learn from them.

See the inability of the law of God is this: even as the law cannot justify, neither can the law itself sanctify. Remember! The inability is designed and built into the law. God never intended for the law to save people or grow them up in that salvation.

Unfortunately, some folks are ready to abandon the law altogether once coming to this realization. “Let’s annihilate it! My goodness! It cannot save you or grow you up!” It reminds me of a commercial, years ago, in which they blew up Jack-in-the-Box—you know, from the restaurant chain. “We do not need him. He is gone. He is out of here.” I heard Jack is back. But so is the law. The law is still here.

Just because it cannot save us and cannot mature us, does not mean we should toss it out. Why? Because it does have some very strategic abilities. It cannot save us. It cannot mature us. It cannot justify us. It cannot sanctify us. But it is given to do certain things and it does them well.
The Ability of the Law of God

Let’s consider from the Word of God the ability granted to the law. Consider Genesis through Deuteronomy, and Matthew 5, 6 and 7. Just think about them for a moment if you are a bit familiar with the Word of God. Genesis through Deuteronomy. The first five books of the Bible. Written by Moses. They are about the law of God, the law of Moses. They define the law of God as given through Moses. Housed in these five books is the basic explanation of God’s law.

Think of Matthew 5, 6, and 7. They contain the Lord Jesus Christ’s famous Sermon on the Mount. In many ways, the Sermon on the Mount is an intensification of the law of God. Recall how it was taught. Jesus would said, “You have heard it said.” And He would follow this by quoting the law of God from the first five books of the Bible. Then He would immediately add, “But I say to you”—and He intensified the power of the law. “You have heard it said that you shall not commit adultery. But I say to you, if you lust after a woman in your heart, you have committed adultery.” Oh, it’s more intense than we thought it was.

What then can the law of God do? It reveals God’s character. He is a holy God. He is neither a cheater, a liar, nor a thief. He is not an adulterer. So neither are we to be such. The revelation of His character is one of the abilities of the Word of God as the law of God.

It also reveals His standards and His moral will. Do this. Do not do that. The law can reveal these things to us. So remember, the law can function like a sort of spiritual yardstick—though you maybe have never seen one of those. When I was a child, everyone had a yardstick. Ours was used to measure and to treat the children. A yardstick—a three-foot ruler. Now everyone has metal, push-button, retractable tape measures or something like that. But whether we speak of a
tape measure, a measuring rod, or a yardstick, we have a good picture of the law of God. The law holds up the standard, the measurement, of what a holy life should be as one stands before God. But it cannot make you what it measures.

For example, if you stood someone up in your household—someone who wanted to be 6’ 2”. Out comes the tape measure and they only end up measuring to 5’ 8”. “Well, we’ve got to get you up to 6’ 2”. Here, eat six inches of this tape measure!” That won’t help him grow up. The tape measure just shows how far they fall short.

So it is with the law of God. As the tape measure rules us against the height we wish to attain, so the law of God measures us against the perfect life that we are called to lead. But what it accomplishes in the end is that the law simply shows us how far short we are. And we cannot grow up to meet that perfect measure by only feeding on the commandments that measure us. The law is like a yardstick showing God’s character, His standard, and His will.

To put it more specifically, Paul speaks of three abilities God has granted to His law.

19 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. 20 Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. (Rom 3:19-20)

First, the law is able to silence every mouth. Imagine having to stand before God to justify ourselves by the standard of the law of God explaining how well we did or why we failed. And
God simply says, “Be holy. Be perfect.” And we stand up before Him and say… nothing. Silence. The law stops every mouth. What can we say? That which He has demanded of us, we are not. Not on our own in any case.

Second, the entire world is accountable to God because all have violated His standard. His glorious standard of holiness—and all of us have fallen short of it.

Third, the law gives us the knowledge of sin. Ultimately, how do we know that cheating and lying and killing and lusting and craving and coveting are sinful? The law tells us. You shall not do it because it is unholy in the sight of a holy God.

The law does have ability and we want to let the law do its work. Continuing in our look at Galatians 3:

Therefore the law was our tutor [our schoolmaster, our child trainer] to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. 

(Gal 3:24)

The greatest ability and greatest purpose of the law of God is to tutor us, teach us, train us, and instruct us of our absolute and total need for the Lord Jesus Christ. The law says, “Be holy.” And we can only answer, “Holy? But I am unholy.” Because of the measure of the law, we recognize we need something better than the law. We recognize our need for Christ. The law says, “Be perfect.” And we can only respond, “Perfect? But I am far from perfect.” Yes, you need Christ. This is the message of the law; it leads us to Jesus Christ.
Do not imagine that this course is inferring that the law is bad.

But we know that the law is good if one uses it lawfully.

(1Ti 1:8)

The law is good; if one uses it lawfully. If you try to use the law to get people saved and forgiven and in heaven, that is an unlawful use of the law. It is like telling a little boy, “Johnny, you be good and obey the Ten Commandments and do the best you can and you’ll get to heaven some day.” That is unlawful (and in fact, quite misleading!) to tell a child. It is against the law of God. It simply is not true! But that does not mean the law is bad. The law is good if we use it lawfully—if we use it for the reasons God sent.

The law has still more interesting work that it can accomplish in the life of a Christian—even once we have found Christ. The law deals with rebelliousness and carnality. Continuing further in 1 Timothy:

Knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person,

but for the lawless and insubordinate [that is, rebellious], for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, [and the list goes on]. (1Ti 1:9)

Primarily, Paul is here speaking of the unsaved who are walking in godlessness. However, Christians sometimes walk after the flesh and behave that way. Become lawless, rebellious, and insubordinate to God the heavenly Father.
Galatians 5:18 is a good verse to read with this, because it tells us, by implication, of an amazing and somewhat frightful thing that is happening to us when we walk in rebellion.

But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

(Gal 5:18)

When led by the Spirit, God’s children are not under the law. What if you are not being led by the Spirit? The implication is that you are putting yourself back under the law. If we are being led, day by day, by the Holy Spirit, walking in the Spirit, depending on the Spirit, then we are not under the law. We are content in that we are not relating to God by how well we perform according to the standards of God. Rather, we are relating to God by the Spirit’s work in and through and with us. But if we are walking in self-sufficiency, walking according to the flesh, we throw ourselves in the midst of our rebellion back under the law.

So then, the law can have a work in our lives as Christian. The law can minister rebuke from a loving, heavenly Father. It can minister to our need for humbling in light of the rebelliousness and self-sufficiency in our lives. We, who are not walking by the Spirit, have put ourselves back under the law. And the work the law’s commission is to humble us. The law reveals to us our self-centeredness, our self-sufficiency, and our self-will. It speaks to our redeemed hearts reminding us that we need to return to dependence on Christ and His Holy Spirit. We need to flee back to grace.

So the message of the law is that we must be holy and be perfect. But the inability of the law is this: it cannot make us perfect, neither in justification nor sanctification. So then, its ability thus: its power to reveal God’s character, His standard, and His will; its power to hold us accountable
to God; its power to strip men of every defense before God; and most importantly, its power to reveal the truth and depth of our sin and thereby tutor us to Jesus Christ.

The Fulfillment of the Law of God

But to our last question! How is the law fulfilled in our lives? To put it another way, how are its demands met in our day-by-day Christian living? This is an exciting, encouraging truth that Jesus begins to expound in His Sermon on the Mount.

Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. (Mat 5:17)

Jesus did not come to crush, annihilate, and discard the law of God. The law is not done away with for it still has a purpose and various works to fulfill. Jesus said, “I did not come to destroy, but I came to fulfill.” Jesus did not come to annihilate God’s law; rather, He came to fulfill that law. Of the ways in which He fulfills the righteous law of God, there are three in particular.

First of all, Jesus fulfills the law by example. He fulfills it by His life. Think of this: there was one human being (and only one) who lived on this earth and never violated the laws of God. He said truthfully, “I do always those things that please My heavenly Father.” The Father said, “This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.” The Scriptures say He was without sin. He fulfilled the law by His life. He fulfilled its every demand. What it said, He did. What it described, He was. He is both the Holy Son of God and perfect man all at the same time.

A second way He fulfilled the law was not in His life, but in His death at the cross. In that, He was fulfilling the penalty of the law. The law said, “The soul that sins must die.” And we were all
under the curse of the law and deserved death. He died on the cross that separated Him from the Father—when all along it was we who deserved death. Thank God, He fulfilled that law. Otherwise we’d have to fulfill that part ourselves. It would be all over. And eternal death would be ours for the eternal crime of transgressing against an eternally holy God.

Now here is where our study concentrates in these six classes: the third fulfillment of the law. Jesus fulfills the law by empowering us to walk day by day in godliness. Colossians 1:27, you may recall, says, “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” Christ in you, the hope of glory. What is our hope of getting to glory? Christ now lives in us. What is our hope of a glorious life that brings day-by-day glory to the Father? Christ in us, the hope of glory. Think of this. The same Lord Jesus Christ, who never once sinned before the law, now lives in you if you are a child of God. My hope of a life that pleases the Father is like Galatians 2:20 says, “I’ve been crucified with Christ, nevertheless, I live. Yet not I, but Christ lives in me.” The more I depend on the Holy Spirit, the more I look to the Lord Jesus Christ. And the more I look to the Lord Jesus Christ, the more He is expressed through me. And the more He is expressed through me, the more I do measure up to the law of God. And the more I do measure up to the law of God, the more my life looks like the life Christ lived that never violated the law.

Romans 3:21-24 also goes a long way toward telling us how Jesus fulfilled the law in the area of justification on our behalf.

But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed.

(Rom 3:21)
Pay close attention here—this is good news! May it be that these verses are used of God to bless your soul. The righteousness of God is there in the law for it says, be righteous just as God is righteous. But notice:

But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed,
being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets. (Rom 3:21)

The law of God tells us how righteous God is—and how righteous we ought to be. But here we note a righteousness that is apart from the law; it is wholly unavailable through the power of the law.

22Even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; 23for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Rom 3:22-23)

If you are here studying and you read this and it’s nothing but confusion or condemnation, remember: all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. You might think, “My goodness! I guess I do not fit in with these religious people. They seem to be able to handle all of this holy, perfect, righteous law stuff.” No. No, we could not. We could not live up to it either. We all fell short of the required measure of righteousness. And apart from Christ in us, we would fall short more and more everyday. Be encouraged. You who have also fallen short in sin, though not able to measure up to the glorious standard of God, still is there hope for you.

Being justified freely by His grace [How?] through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. (Rom 3:24)
Christ died on the cross and paid the debt for sin. He bought us out of bondage to sin so that we might be justified freely by His grace. Justified! Declared innocent! Even more, declared not guilty! And all this is obtained by His grace because Christ paid the debt.

Oh the grace of God! That is how we find salvation. If you have not been justified by the grace of God freely through faith in Christ, just tell Him even now, “Lord Jesus, I see I’m one of those all who sinned and fell short of Your standard. Forgive me by Your grace through Jesus Christ.”

The fulfillment of the law for justification is complete. The penalty of the law has been removed through Jesus Christ.

The last verse in our study, Romans 8:4, speaks to the manner of our sanctification. Just previous, in verse 3, Paul tells the reason us that God sent His own Son to take care of sin in the flesh.

That the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (Rom 8:4)

What is the righteous requirement of the law? Be holy. Be perfect. There is now a way for the righteous requirement of the law to be fulfilled in us. Can you imagine that? Day by day, more and more, what the law demands can be taking place in our lives. How? If we will be those who do not walk according to the flesh (the way of the flesh is self-resource, works of the law, carnal effort to prove we can live up to the things of God), but rather, live according to the Spirit.
Humbly depend on the Holy Spirit to make the life of Christ in yourself: real in your strength and your resource and your daily portion.

Christ is fulfillment of the law for us in justification, and in and through us for sanctification. We are justified freely by His grace. We are sanctified by His grace day by day. And that is the central theme of these studies. As we walk in dependence on the Holy Spirit, this allows Jesus to live in and through us; and God’s grace is the dynamic at work day by day in our lives.

To Conclude

In conclusion, remember the law of God says, “Be holy. Be perfect.” But its inability lies in the fact that it cannot make us perfect. Its ability is it can show us our need for the Lord Jesus Christ. And then the fulfillment of the law is through faith in Jesus Christ both for salvation and for daily living. Ultimately we could say this: God’s law reveals to us our great need for the grace of God. And that is what we shall study directly our next time together.

Closing Prayer

Lord, we acknowledge Your holy law. How high and lofty. It’s a description of You, Lord. And all of us have sinned and fallen short. We pray for any who have never known Your saving, justifying grace that will just give their heart to You right now in faith. And for those of us who know You, Lord, have the Spirit in our lives, we’ve been justified, declared innocent through Christ, teach us how to be sanctified, growing, maturing, growing in and by the grace of God. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.
Growing in the Grace of God

Lesson 2
The Grace of God

By
Bob Hoekstra

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Opening Prayer

Father, we come with hunger. We come with thanksgiving. We come with eagerness. We come with expectation. We come with delight in You and joy for the prospect of meeting You again face to face in Your Word. We ask You to enlighten us by the work of the Holy Spirit. Feed us. Strengthen us. Unfold some of the glories of Your grace. Give us more of a spiritual grasp of it to see what You want to say to us, what You have for us, and what You wish to do in and with and through us. We praise You for the riches of Your grace and ask You to unfold them tonight, for Your glory and for our progress in the faith. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Introduction

As we continue our studies on the theme of Growing in the Grace of God, the topic of this session will be more directly related to the subject in that we shall deal with the grace of God specifically. Last session we covered the law of God. This session we shall cover the grace of God. And you can tell by the title of the series of studies that we shall speak to the concerns of day-by-day Christian living. We shall expound on grace for Christians today: grace not only to come to the new life in Christ, but grace as well to see that life developed. We shall look at the grace of God unto sanctification more and more.

By way of introduction, we shall quickly return Romans 6:14, which we recall from last session.

For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace. (Rom 6:14)
Again, this truth rears forth: we who believe are not under law, but stand under grace. Our first study, of course, oriented us to the law of God and we saw the ultimate message of the law of God is, “Be holy. Be perfect.” We also saw that the law of God, being deficient, cannot make us holy or perfect. But we also noted that the law of God has the ability to reveal our need, make us accountable before God, and alert us to sin’s reality and the fact that we are sinners. And then the law can tutor us to the Lord Jesus Christ. We also looked at the fulfillment of the law of God in our lives, centering around the life and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. The entire work of our salvation, all the way from justification through sanctification is fulfilled by Christ. All our salvation— initiation, process, and fulfillment— find their base in who He is, what He’s done, what He is to us now, and what He provides.

The more we read about, pray about, meditate on, and study the law of God, the more we appreciate the grace of God. We respect the law more through study as well— but as great as our appreciation for the law becomes, our appreciation for God’s grace should grow and increase all the more. “You are not under law, but under grace.”

Grace is God’s plan and God’s provision to keep sin from dominating our lives. Who but God would come up with such a plan? If I were God— I know you are all quietly thanking God that I am not— but if I were God, I would think, “Let’s just crack down on the law. Surely that is the key. Thou shalt and thou shalt not. And if that doesn’t work, we’ll put it in capital letters. If that does not work, we’ll go to neon.” The amazing thing is that it is not an increased focus on the law and a more serious, diligent approach to it that keeps sin from dominating our lives; but as we read, “Sin shall not have dominion over you, because you are not under law, but under grace.”
God provides greatly for His people. There is a way to live one’s life in Christ with sin bearing less and less domination, and having an ill influence in our walk with the Lord. And it centers upon the grace of God. Now that truly draws me on. That is drawing by lovingkindness. Oh, yes. That is what I want. That is what we should all want. That sounds so good! God’s loyal steadfast love, by His grace, provides a way for sin to have less and less of a grip on your life and mine.

We also looked at Hebrews 7:18-19.

**For on the one hand there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness,**

**For the law made nothing perfect; on the other hand, there is the bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God.** (Hbr 7:18-19)

The law of God is unable to set us free from the domination of sin. It was never designed to do that. It was, however, designed to let us know what sin is and reveal our personal and individual proclivity towards sin. The law makes nothing perfect; it only demands perfection. Oh how that causes us to appreciate, to hunger for, to desire growth in the grace of God.

**Grace Beyond Law**

We shall see the Lord develop a little more of this great truth that grace, not law, is that which makes perfect our faith. We touched upon it briefly last session, but really this will be the focus of that which follows. The Scriptures herald this theme time and time again. “Grace, not law! Grace, not law!” The first chapter of the Gospel of John— that glorious and eminently unique gospel— though touching on the historical progress of the life and ministry of Jesus, brings so
much of the heavenly purpose down into the earthly walk of the Lord Jesus Christ. In John 1 we see that it is grace and not law that believers adore in Jesus Christ.

For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. (Jhn 1:17)

God used Moses to reveal His holy character in the law, to lay out His standards in the law, and to indicate His will in the law. But grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

In the truth that the Lord Jesus shares, we see the Lord’s greatness and His character and His will. But oh, this glorious addition as well—grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. If the Lord Jesus Christ had not come, we would not have what we need to walk in the righteousness of God. Thank the Lord for His law, but do not ever be content to stop there. 2 Corinthians 3:7, 8 says the law has a glory, but it also adds that grace has a glory so great that it makes it look like the law has no glory at all. The glory of the law is the glory of realizing our deficiency. It reveals our sin before a holy God. How much more glorious is the grace of God which tells us we have a remedy for our problem! Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace.

(Jhn 1:16)

John 1:14 tells us that when Jesus came, He came full of grace and truth. And now, do you know what you and I have received right out of His fullness? Out of the fullness of the grace of God, we have received grace upon grace. In fact, our testimony should be considered due evidence of that fact. If we want to explain to someone God’s grace in our lives, we could point directly to the
history of our personal Christian experience; even the fact of our salvation is abundant evidence of God’s work of grace. It has been grace upon grace! And we might even add grace upon grace upon grace. Upon grace upon grace! How often you reiterate this truth depends upon how much time you have to give testimony to the work of God in your life.

That is how grace manifests between the Lord and us. Out of His fullness! Out of His full supply of the infinite measures of His grace, we have received abundantly. And then God just deals with us as one gracious work— one gracious provision upon another gracious work and another gracious provision. That is God’s way with us in Jesus Christ: grace upon grace.

**Defining Grace**

What is grace anyway? For years now, between fifteen and twenty years, I have been trying to jot down descriptions of the grace of God. I have given up on finding a final definition. A definition is supposed to capture the whole thing, but our language and thoughts are just far too limited in scope to accomplish the task. We shall simply let the Lord do this out of His glory when we meet Him in glory. Still, it is always good and edifying to see the Lord’s descriptions of His grace— new slants and perspectives that will continue to build our appreciation for that wonderful grace.

Let me share with you my latest feeble attempt. The grace of God, what is it? If it is grace upon grace we have received and walk in, and we are studying to understand growth in the grace of God, what is it? Grace is God’s free provision for us through His Son. And grace manifests itself as we trust in the person and work of His Son by granting us all that we would need, all that we would yearn for, and all that we are commanded to walk in and become. And all this is granted despite our inadequacy and the fact that we could never deserve, could never earn, and could never produce the merit that would earn or deserve these gifts on our own.
Growing in the Grace of God - Bob Hoekstra
The Grace of God

There is really so much more to the grace of God than that. That we know so little, and that which we do know is so great, really kind of stirs my heart. Even just the verses that reveal that part work joy in my heart. As we trust in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, God provides all of this glorious grace. And it is without any doubt, grace upon grace.

Therefore, let Galatians 2:21 be our testimony even as it was the apostle Paul’s.

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

Think of the implications of that. Jesus would not have had to come to this sin-cursed world, die an agonizing and terrorizing death. Recall how He shuddered as the cup of sin came to Him in the garden. Everything in His eternal, holy being shrinking back from sin and death and yet He submits to the Father: “Not My will but Yours be done.” Jesus would not have had to come to the cross and go through all of that if righteousness were available through the law. If we foolishly think the law is enough, we are saying the death of Jesus Christ was in vain. It was a waste. There was no point to it. If we say that, we trample the blood of Christ.

“So we do not set aside the grace of God.” We cling to it. We stand on it. We hope in it. We grow in it. In fact, that death of Christ was the ultimate demonstration of the grace of God.

So often we tie the grace of God into the death of Christ but forget to relate its power to the resurrection, the ascension, and the on-going intercessory and living-in-us ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. Maybe you are with the great multitude of us, who have made this serious mistake
about the grace of God. I did early on. I think I made every mistake you could possibly make concerning the grace of God, as far as misunderstanding it and misapplying it and misappropriating it.

I used to think that the grace of God was equal to the forgiveness of God—a major misunderstanding on my part. We know now that the grace of God supplies forgiveness, but one of those two realities (that of God’s grace and that of God’s forgiveness) is far greater than the other. Consider for yourself; truly grace is immeasurably greater than forgiveness.

Forgiveness is our first deep drink of the cup of the grace of God. Many imagine they have hit the bottom of the cup with that first sip. “Thank You, Lord, I needed that. Forgiven!” No, no. That was the first gulp out of an ocean of grace. Do not relegate the grace of God only to forgiveness.

If forgiveness were all the grace of God we ever got, would you not be willing to praise Him and serve Him and live in His glorious presence forever? I would. But thankfully, it is far better than that! Again, it is grace upon grace. The grace of God is far more than merely forgiveness (as good as it is!). And most of the studying we will be doing in this series is related to this issue of grace upon the grace of forgiveness. Grace for growing. Grace for maturing. Grace for serving. Grace for becoming more and more like the Lord Jesus Christ. So we do not want to set aside for a moment the full beauty of the grace of God. It is through the grace of God that the righteous life of Christ becomes more and more our portion and our walk.

**God’s Justifying Grace**

Now we shall briefly review God’s justifying grace and then let the Lord build on it concerning God’s sanctifying grace. Recall the words of Romans 3 from last session. We are those who have
called upon the Lord Jesus Christ and we now number among the ones who have been granted the saving work of His grace.

Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. (Rom 3:24)

Remember what justification is—the declaration of our innocence without guilt by a holy Judge, God Himself. Even though we know that on our own we were everything but innocent, still God has judged us innocent. We were entirely guilty: guilty of sin and deserving of eternal death. The holy Judge is also a loving and gracious Judge. And through the death of Christ, Paul tells us, God can be just and the justifier. He wants to be our justifier, but He cannot just sweep sin under the rug. He is no compromiser. He is holy. He cannot act like He’s not holy. But He had planned a path to justice, to remain true and holy and righteous, and prepared a manner in which to be the justifier of we ungodly, guilty sinners who called on the name of the Lord for forgiveness and salvation.

Justification is freely given to us by grace, for “blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” And remember Isaiah’s admonition to embrace God’s grace in this manner: “Come you who have no money, buy milk and bread and wine and feast on the things of God” (Isa 55). We do not have anything worthwhile with which to barter with God for our redemption; instead, He offers justification to us freely by His grace. We confess our bankruptcy and He gives us His riches of forgiveness as we trust in Jesus Christ. Justified freely by His grace. Christ is our redeemer. Christ paid the price of redemption. Christ paid the price to buy us out of bondage to sin and back to fellowship with God.
Justified by grace. Ephesians 1:7 describes it in a beautiful way. “In Him we have redemption through His blood.” I love the attention God brought early on to the beautiful truth of being in Christ. That is where the grace is and that is where we live. Again, I cannot believe how many years I overlooked that glorious phrase in the Scriptures. But we shall study that a couple sessions from now. “In Him,” which is where we are now, “we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sin.”

Now these are things that are involved in justification. Redemption by the blood of Christ, that most precious of costs! The priceless blood of the eternal, righteous lamb that brings us forgiveness of sins. The declaration of innocence by a holy God “according to the riches of His grace.” To spend the riches of His grace, God did not bankrupt His treasure house of grace in His forgiving of us— for inestimable is the vastness of His wealth of grace. He did not spend it all. He has an infinite surplus remaining. And these riches are ours to be had— they belong to His children.

**God’s Sanctifying Grace**

There are treasures untold to draw on, to live on day by day, and to rely upon by the grace of God. I have been one who, in years past, greatly underestimated the riches of the grace of God. I do not want to do that anymore. I want to realize more and more how vast these treasures are. They are there for us to draw upon. They are there for us to live by. They are there in heavenly places to draw on for our walk in earthly realms.

And where do we draw upon those uncountable riches? In God’s sanctifying work of grace day by day. We shall discuss for the remainder of this session God’s sanctifying grace and the matters so related. It is the heart of our study in these six lessons.
Years ago when I began searching the Scriptures for indicators that the grace of God existed not only for forgiveness, but for living and growing and serving and maturing and for victory and for progress as well, I sought out Titus 2.

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men (Tts 2:11)

That again is the aspect of the grace of God with which most of us are familiar. In fact, every Christian has to be familiar with that to enter into the salvation of the Lord; recognizing God’s saving grace is essential. “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.” God has offered salvation to all men by His grace; but for those who received it, those who received salvation by His grace, that same grace carries on a further ministry. That grace ministers to its subjects through teaching.

Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age (Tts 2:12)

God’s grace, which brings salvation, also teaches us to turn from ungodliness and so, walk in godliness. God’s grace teaches us and trains us unto a godly life. Godliness may be the ultimate way to speak of sanctification. Denying ungodliness, and living soberly, righteously, and godly in this present age, is related to the teaching and training ministry of that same grace of God that brings salvation to all men.
A gain we see the grace of God is not just for forgiveness. It also purposes to grow the children of faith in their godliness. The word here translated in Titus as “teaching us” is similar to another New Testament word that can be translated the same—a word that often refers to the making of disciples. It is by the grace of God that we start out as disciples of the Lord; and God’s grace just keeps working in us, discipling us, training us, and transforming us further into the image of Jesus Christ. This is God’s sanctifying grace.

Here we note one of the most obvious statements revealing that God’s grace is meant for sanctification. This verse is actually thematic for this series of studies.

But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. A men.

(2Pe 3:18)

Grace is a realm in which we are to grow and develop. Grace is also the means by which we are to grow and develop in that grace. We are to increasingly understand, appreciate, appropriate, draw on, and live by the grace of God. And as we do, we shall necessarily grow in that grace. Just as a child does not cause itself to grow, so it is with grace. The life that is there is nurtured by what is given to that life: we feed that child; we care for that child; and we minister to that child’s life. Soon the child blossoms and grows and develops—naturally and without force. So it is with God and the grace He grants us. We are the children of God by the grace of God; and what nurtures this grace-gift of life is simply more of that grace. And God is ever-pleased to grant it abundantly.
It is the grace of God that gave us salvation and new life in Christ. It is the grace of God that nurtures that life and develops that life and brings it to what the Lord wants it to be. That is why we are told, “But grow in the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” We shall later speak of growing in the knowledge of our Lord and knowing our Lord, which is also directly related to His grace at work in us.

We are to grow in the grace of God. This speaks to the process of sanctification. Grow in the grace of God. This is not about justification. That happens in a moment. Justification is the immediate culmination of the process of God calling us and wooing us by His truth and His Spirit. But once birthed, once given new life by the grace of God, we are to continue to grow in grace. We are to develop in and by the grace of God. Sanctification, the day-by-day process of maturing more and more unto the fullness of the stature of Christ (as Ephesians 4 puts it), is the single word that captures this concept of growth in grace.

Here is another powerful picture of the grace of God unto sanctification more and more. Acts 20:32. At this point in the unfolding of the early church, the apostle Paul has gone throughout much of the Mediterranean world, planting the seed of the gospel and thereby planting churches. He is traveling his way to Jerusalem where chains and bonds and trouble await him. Paul calls the leaders of the church down to the coastline at Miletus and begins to pour out his heart to them in their last visit together before they gather around the heavenly throne in the glorious future.

So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. (Act 20:32)
Note that sanctified is here used in the past tense. There are really three aspects of sanctification: past, present and future.

When we came to Christ we were sanctified in the sense that we were set apart from the world unto God. An alternate rendering of sanctification in this sense would be to speak of being set apart for the glory of God, the purposes of God, and the use of God. In one sense that happened when we were taken out of Adam and placed in Christ; this occurred when we were called out of the world and became a part of the body of Christ. We were sanctified and set apart to God—all in the past.

Some day in the future there is also a great and full sanctification awaiting us where we will be entirely set apart from everything else for the glory of God, the use of God, and the purposes of God for eternity and nothing will interfere with that. This is referred in the Scriptures by the name, glorification.

But here lies the rub: we live in this present, on-going process of sanctification. The learning, the stumbling, the maturing, and the growing are all an immediate portion of our daily experience as believers. Right in the middle of this, Paul’s admonition to the Miletans, there is spoken of a glorious relationship through the process of grace, day by day of sanctification. Paul was commending the brethren from the church to God and to the word of His grace. One of the great titles for the Word of God is the word of His grace. It is His word and truly, it speaks volumes to His magnificent grace.

God’s word about His grace is described here as being able to do two things: to build you up and to give you an inheritance among those who are set apart to God. Of these two things, again,
every Christian is familiar with one of them. Many Christians are unfamiliar with the other of the two. Of course all Christians recognize the fact that grace is able to give us an inheritance among those who are set apart for God. All of us who have been brought out of Adam into Christ, out of the world into the body of Christ, know an inheritance awaits us. We know, by the grace of God, that we are headed for the home of God our heavenly Father. We are bound for that country where Jesus went to prepare us a place. We have an inheritance awaiting us.

The world looks at most of us like we do not have much and they are right in that by sight, we can have nothing better than them. But truly, the Christian joy and hope lies in our inheritance that awaits us beyond the borders of mere sight. Riches beyond measure to plunge into for the glory and service of God for eternity! That is the inheritance awaiting us. And we who know the Lord, know we have that inheritance ahead. We are joint-heirs with Christ. Heaven is our home. Really, there are just a whole bunch of us getting very, very homesick. We want nothing more than to plunge into the inheritance that will multiply our love and praise and worship for our Lord God Almighty. And we recognize that it comes from grace alone.

But far too often, far too many of us have stifled our growth in knowing this other business of grace—this business of sanctification. “So now brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up.” Give praise to God for the heavenly inheritance awaiting you. But that is not the whole story. There is more grace available for other things than just someday receiving that inheritance. There is grace in the word of God for being built up. “The word of His grace which is able to build you up.” Again, we are talking about sanctification. Edification. Growth. Service.
God has granted us a desire to grow in our Christian life and spirit. We have a desire to grow in the things of God, to be strengthened, to get built up, and to become more useable. And just how is this strengthening going to take place?

Sometimes we see maturing, fruitful, effective Christians and we think, “Oh I wish I could make my life like that.” The plain hard fact is that you cannot! But the grace of God can. Sometimes we are tempted to believe that we simply do not have the knack for that kind of spiritual living. We refuse to believe that we, too, can be that effective. We see saints who have grown to great depths of maturity in their faith and we lose heart believing that we could never mature in such a way. No, it is true; we do not have the power to bring that to pass. But the grace of God at work in your life can bring it to pass. There is a way. There is a way to be built up effectively in our life of faith. We must continually commend one another to the word of His grace, which is able to build us up. The power of grace is in God’s word.

Personally, I love to study the Scriptures about the ability of the word of God. I love it. It is one of my favorite themes. It builds faith. It builds expectation. It builds confidence in the Word of God. And studying the power of God’s word leads to me to proclaim it boldly. The ability of the word of God, here called the word of His grace, is able by God’s gracious power to build us up. When men commend their lives to the word of His grace, God proves the power of His grace in their lives. His grace is able to build us up.

His grace is freely provided through His Son and the work of His Son and the provisions of His Son. His grace is all that in which we need to walk. It is all to which He is calling us— and even commanding us. “The word of His grace, which is able to build you up.”
I sat with a young man in Dallas, when I was pastoring there back in the late 60s and early 70s. My heart went out to this young man. He said, “You know, I have been a Christian a few years and I have been trying to figure out how it works and how it doesn’t.” And he said, “I have come to this conclusion. Some can just do it and some cannot. And I cannot.” It broke my heart because in saying that, he was saying he was finished with trying to live the Christian life.

But in a sense, that is a good place to be. Nobody appreciates the grace of God like somebody who has finally been convinced that grace is their only hope. It is not that some can do it and some cannot. It is that nobody can make themselves like Christ. But the grace of God can work on us, in us, and through us—and it will. So more and more, our own efforts become less visible and more of Christ takes the place of what was once our image—and so we grow in Christlikeness. The grace of God can do that. It is ever able to build us up. We should find great encouragement in the grace of God, for there are riches to draw on from the grace of God that can build us up in this life now. That is God’s sanctifying grace.

Hebrews 13 speaks of another demonstration of God’s sanctifying grace.

Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines. [That is, weird teachings contrary to the Word of God, often contrary to the grace of God.] For it is good that the heart be established by grace, not with foods [that is, ceremonial, religious foods] which have not profited those who have been occupied with them. (Hbr 13:9)
It is not religious ritual that matures us and strengthens us. It is the grace of God at work on our lives. The heart must be established by grace. The heart is the inner man, the true spiritual being. This is the new man, the new person in Christ. The heart is where the Holy Spirit dwells and wants to reveal Christ to us as our life according to Colossians 3:4. The heart is that out of which flows all of the issues of life.

It is good that the heart be established by grace. Established. Stabilized. Grounded. It is good that the heart be made firm and strong and increasingly, spiritually predictable. It should be built by grace to become reliable in the strength of the Lord. It is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace.

Do you ever get wishy-washy inside? Does resolve seem to slip through your fingers or your ribs? “Where did it go, my commitment? My resolve? My certainty? My dedication? My zeal? My confidence? Where has it gone?” The world about you would just ask you to reach a little deeper for the world would say that it is in a man’s depths that he finds resolve. No, we do not need to reach a little deeper; rather, we should open up a little wider. “Pour in some more grace, Lord. Establish my heart by grace.” A heart established in the grace of the Lord is a heart of resolve and a heart of dedication.

God’s people have been given an inner desire for the stabilization of our private, inner spiritual relationship with the Lord. We are given a desire for a life and walk with the Lord that is stabilized, strengthened, grounded, solid, and a firm foundation. How are we going to get it? The grace of God exists for this too.
As we consider the grace of God, learn of the grace of God, and commit our hearts to the grace of God, that grace will naturally establish itself in our heart. And as our heart is gradually built a firmer foundation in God’s grace, so that foundation will gradually find demonstration in our life and walk. The grace of God reaches down into the deepest and innermost part of our being and stabilizes us, setting us on the solid rock of our salvation.

The grace of God is God’s work on us, for us, with us, and in us. It is the provision purchased by the Lord Jesus Christ and both abundantly and freely available to those who believe. Take joy that your heart be established by grace. Paul speaks to this in 2 Timothy:

You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. (2Ti 2:1)

Now clearly, this is not a verse about grace for justification. This is grace for sanctification. It is something in which we are to be strong—something in which we are to grow in the strength. Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Paul was writing to Timothy, who was already justified, but like all of us needed to press on in being sanctified. How do we progress in the Christian life? By the grace of God!

**Living by God’s Grace**

The Christian life takes strength. In one sense it is not for weaklings. In a better sense, the only ones who will make it are the ones who realize they are weaklings. For it is they who recognize their weakness that become very interested in the grace of God! We have the picture of the strong Christian life. It is like we have got forty Bibles in each hand and we are kind of pumping biblical
iron. “And watch me do this for God!” Oh, what a quenching of the Spirit of God. Oh, what an
ignorance of the grace of God. Oh, what a disqualification of the grace of God.

We are to be strong and I marvel at how much strength the Christian life and ministry and service
takes. We are in Christ Jesus and it is here, where we are, that grace is abounding. Be strong in it.
Get strengthened by it. Learn much about it. Learn to rely upon it. Be strong in it. I want to be a
strong Christian— but not in the flesh and not in my own self-effort. Be strong in the grace of the
Lord.

I truly began to appreciate the grace of God fifteen or twenty years ago after overlooking it and
neglecting it shamefully for so long. And now I have never appreciated the grace of God more
than I have in the last three or four years. Pastoring the two churches the Lord has had me pastor
for twenty-five years, I have found just how much pastors need the grace of God. But as the Lord
sent me out to minister to the body of Christ across the country and overseas, I recognized that I
needed to learn new ways to draw on new measures of the grace of God.

And that is the way it is with all of us. However far we have come, if we have really come any
distance at all, it has been by the grace of God at work on us and in us. And the things ahead will
probably stretch us beyond what the grace behind us already met.

What do we do with that sort of a situation— where new challenges make us feel at times like we
have not matured, grown, developed, or become strong, because these new challenges look
impossible? We beg God for the strength again in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. His grace is
immeasurable. We shall never face anything here on earth with which His grace is not sufficient
to deal. Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.
Growing in the Grace of God - Bob Hoekstra
The Grace of God

Being strong in grace is an interesting paradox. Living by grace has nothing to do with our own strengths and efforts, but everything to do with confessing our personal weakness. Many of us have been too macho-strong to ever be truly strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. How does that work? James 4:6 explains.

But He gives more grace. ...

That is the will of God. That is the desire of God. He’s given us so much grace, but still He gives us more.

But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

How do you qualify for the on-going work of the grace of God? Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God. Walk humbly with our God, for God gives grace to the humble. God resists the proud. Many Christians in self-sufficiency, self-reliance, and a world-taught confidence are not living by the grace of God. Rather, they are fighting, striving, pressing, and pushing against the resistance of God. Note that. God resists the proud. Those times when we thought we could handle the situation, when we imagined we were capable, and when we believed in our own sufficiency, we came up against the resistance of God. We beat against the wind. We ran as if on a treadmill: furiously, but without headway. There is God, with one finger on our forehead holding us back— but we are often too stubborn and self-sufficient to notice. God resists the proud.
Do not consider what we can do for God. Consider instead what God can do in and through us. He wants to give more grace. He yearns to give more grace. He loves to pour out grace. That is the glory of the kingdom of God. But He knows it must only be poured upon the humble. Those who admit they need God’s work, God’s provision, and God’s activity in their lives.

Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Finding that strength involves admitting we have no strength. Humility. Remembering that no man can handle this Christian life, the believer cries out to God, “I need You!” God loves to hear that confession in prayer. He knows it is the truth. We have no strength. He knows we need it and He will happily grant it. And He wants to give more grace. He gives grace to the humble.

The kingdom of God lives on the provisions of God. Just as a branch lives on the provision of the life in the vine, so we need the flowing grace of God to flourish in the life we are called to in Christ. And it is humility that opens up the gates of that connection. The branch to the vine of God’s grace is humility.

I pray God would forgive us for the self-sufficient pride in which we have walked. I pray that God would forgive the modern church for training people up in religious self-confidence. We should have been teaching one another to bow humbly before our God—to prostrate ourselves before His throne. The modern church needs revival. We need another reformation: a reformation of humility and a reformation of grace. The reformers of the 16th century cried out, “Justification by grace!” We need some reformers crying out, “Sanctification by grace!” Praise God for those who died to proclaim that only by grace are we justified. Now, however, our need is as great for some soldiers to stand proclaiming that only by grace are we sanctified. How is the army of God going to move on if not by grace? How are the children of God going to grow up if not by grace?
How are we going to be mighty if not by grace? Rejoice in the grace of God. Embrace that grace being strong in that grace. God’s grace does not flow to and through self-sufficient and self-reliant lives, but rather, through those who are dependent upon the Lord.

Through whom [through the Lord Jesus Christ] also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand. (Rom 5:2)

What a tremendous heavenly description of our position and what is there for us. We—you and me, all who are in Christ—have access into this grace. How do we access the grace of God? How is it made available to us? First of all, we must realize that we already stand in it! Sometimes we have the picture of God way, way off somewhere. We moan and fret and plead for grace begging for God to offer us some of His richness. And God could cry out to us, “Well look around you. You’re standing in grace!”

Through Christ also, we have access into this grace in which we stand. The very place we stand before God is a place of grace. That is how we got there. That is how we shall thrive there. Through Christ. Grace is now available to us abundantly—through Christ. We stand in it. Imagine a pauper standing in a field of gold coins and a sign says, “Take all you need—just give the thanks and the glory to the provider.” The pauper, befuddled, stands in the midst of this wondrous field of bounty crying out, “I’m poor! Help me!” In spite of the silliness of the picture, that is often the way we behave toward the abundant riches of God. In Christ, we stand in grace. We have access to it through Him.

Yet how do we avail ourselves of the bounty of grace? “Through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand.” By faith we draw on the grace of God. Believing God.
Growing in the Grace of God - Bob Hoekstra
The Grace of God

Trusting in God. Relying on God. Depending upon God. Accepting what He has said, what He has done, and what He offers is the simple key to accessing these riches.

For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith;
as it is written, "The just shall live by faith." (Rom 1:17)

Martin Luther and others, hundreds of years ago, by the revealing work of the Spirit and the grace of God, courageously and appropriately applied this glorious truth to justification by faith, drawing ever upon the grace of God. But we have seen in many places that same grace is there for sanctification. And how do we appropriate it? How do we draw on it? How do we access it? By faith of course! The just shall live by faith. God’s justified ones live by faith alone. Initially, continually, and increasingly, we live by faith. Our lives and spirits are sustained by trusting in the Lord, by depending upon the Lord. We count on Him and He supplies His grace. The just shall live by faith.

To Conclude

In reflection and conclusion, here is a thought to consider. Since we are justified and sanctified by the impact of the grace of God in and upon our lives, does this mean that man does nothing in his growing and serving by the grace of God? Some hear the message of the grace of God and then imagine there is no contribution on their part. Truly, it is God’s grace and it is not about we can do but what He can do in and through us. Does that mean we are to do nothing and are mere robots to the grace of God? Not at all. We get fully engaged and entirely involved in the life of grace.
But it happens in ways related to trusting and depending on the Lord. It is the whole matter of learning to live by faith—walking by faith, not by sight. The perplexing thing in all of this is that we all have a question that is almost burning in us but we are almost afraid to say it because once we say it, it sounds funny. How do you do faith anyway? But the answer lies not in how do we do it, but how do we grow in it. We grow in our faith by this day-by-day trusting the Lord in whatever He has revealed to us, in whatever He has provided for us, and in whatever He has unfolded for us in the Word applying that grace to the circumstances at hand in this moment.

Whether like the prophet Elijah off by the Brook Cherith having to let the ravens feed you and living such by faith or being on top of Mount Carmel, calling down fire against the hundreds of false prophets—we always must live by faith. The key is not activity. The key is not inactivity. The key is trusting in the Lord. The just shall live by faith.

We shall see time and again in these studies on growing in the grace of God, that such growth in grace hinges upon faith.

Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace.

(Rom 4:16)

The striving of the flesh—whether to be great and mighty or live up to the standards of God—never goes with the grace of God. But believing God fits the grace of God. Faith and grace go together hand-in-glove. Drawing on the grace of God and living by the grace of God involves learning day by day to trust God in whatever is at hand, to work in and through our lives by the resources and impact of His grace upon us.
Closing Prayer

Father, we thank You that You have told us the truth. You are the truth. We can believe in You. Keep speaking to us Your glorious truth. We want to depend on it—depend on You. Keep opening up for us Your wondrous grace. We want to count on it, to live by faith in it. Teach us, Lord, this glorious relationship between faith and grace. Grace is Your provision. Faith is our response. As we study, session after session, show us more and more that the way to grow in grace is by trusting in You every step of the way. Reveal it to us. In Jesus’ name.

Amen.
Growing in the Grace of God

Lesson 3
Living Daily by the Grace of God

By
Bob Hoekstra

Brought to you by

Blue Letter Bible
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Opening Prayer

Father, we come again with hunger and expectation, with joy and delight. We love being fed by You, Lord. We are hungry. We want to feed on the Word of God, the Bread of Life. And we thank You, Lord, for the Holy Spirit. We are thirsty and Lord Jesus, we come to You believing that You can meet that need, quench that thirst, and fill us with Your Spirit as You teach us and enlighten us. We ask You to give us understanding to guide us into all the truth. And we are asking, Lord, for more than just comprehension, but for an apprehension and appropriation of believing and walking in the very things that You speak to us about. And we ask all of this work and all of Your will in our study now, in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Introduction

This third session in our series on Growing in the Grace of God is about living daily by the grace of God. We have seen already in the Word of God that it is not by law but by grace that we meet the Lord and walk with the Lord. Last session, we ended right at this point: discovering how the believer is to live by grace. We shall briefly return to two Scriptures to refresh our minds with the previous session’s theme. One major issue in living day by day by the grace of God is the issue of humility.

But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." (Jam 4:6)

The self-sufficient and the self-reliant are not looking for the grace of God. In their pride they do not walk in that flowing supply of the riches of the grace of God. God resists the proud. He is
opposed to the proud. And so He humbles the hearts of the proud. Those who think they can handle it by their own best effort or resource will be broken that God may properly bless them with life in His grace. God resists the proud, but He gives grace to the humble. Humility is vital in living day by day by the grace of God. Humility is central to the recognition of our need by the grace of God daily. This is critical. It is those who recognize with God that we need His grace, to whom God is ready to pour out His grace upon and in and through. Humility: it is vital to living day by day by the grace of God.

Also essential to living in the grace of the Lord is faith. Faith is the intimate partner with humility for both are necessary to the abounding life of grace God promises. Humility says, “I need help.” Faith says, “I can trust God for that help.”

Through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand. (Rom 5:2)

Through the Lord Jesus Christ, all of us who know Him have access by faith into this grace in which we stand. The very spiritual ground, the very condition in which we stand before God is grace. By grace He brought us close to Himself. In grace we stand before Him. How we access that grace that is all around us, as we stand before the true and living God is by faith. Faith is essential. Trusting in the Lord and His provision by depending upon the Lord and His supply: this is faith.

Faith is all about the Lord Jesus Christ— who He is and what He is done. It is all about who He has made us in Himself and what He offers to those who are in Him. To bring that relationship with the Lord down to very personal terms of a day-by-day walk by grace, humility, and faith
strike right at the heart of it. Humility says, “We need what You have, Lord.” Our faith says, “We trust that what You have can be our portion and that what You offer is fully sufficient for our need.”

**Bearing Fruit by Grace**

Now with that in mind, we shall look at living daily by the grace of God. We shall look at the desire to walk in humble faith, trusting God. And in that walk with God, we can be those who are bearing fruit and walking in good works and seeing a life of obedience developed. The grace of God is not just a ticket to some spiritual Hawaii with a spiritual sun, surf, palm trees, hammock, and tropical juices to enjoy. Now God gives plenty of those kinds of blessings, but the grace of God goes far beyond that. If we think that is what grace is all about, we have a terribly sad misunderstanding of the grace of God.

The grace of God is about bearing fruit. The grace of God is about abounding in good works. The grace of God is tied into, even producing, a growing life of obedience. The bearing of fruit is absolutely and directly tied into the grace of God. The grace of God is available to you and me; and additionally, that grace is able to develop fruitful lives for you and me.

Which has come to you, as it has also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit, as it is also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth. (Col 1:6)

God’s word brings forth fruit in our lives because it lets us know of the grace of God. And faith comes by hearing that powerful word. And as we hear the word of God and it speaks of the grace of God, our faith is stirred. The believer can trust in that supply of
God’s grace, for it never fails. We hear of the grace of God and through His word, we come to know it in truth. We come to understand and rely upon it. That grace that we hear of in His word—truly the all-powerful grace of God—will not fail to bring forth fruit in our lives. The word of the truth of the gospel described here in Colossians 1:6 is the fulcrum about which hearing and knowing relate to the grace of God.

Having fruit in our lives is directly linked to living by the grace of God.

Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another... that we should bear fruit to God. (Rom 7:4)

You and I have now become dead to the law—dead through the body of Christ. His body hung upon that tree and He died there; and dead men are not answerable to the law. When He died on that tree, we died with Him by faith. And as we are united to Christ in His death to sin, even so are we united to Christ in His death to the law—united that we might be married to another, joined to another.

We were joined in accountability directly to the law of God. Now through Christ’s death, we become dead to the law that we might be joined to another. We were joined to one who said, “Be as holy as God.” But now, and gloriously, we have been joined to another—joined to one who is alive and who is holy. To Him who has been raised from the dead comes a new life, a resurrection life. In that life and joined to that life, we can bear fruit to God.
This verse in Romans reminds us that it is not a matter of law, but a matter of the Lord Jesus Christ and the grace that is found in Him. Christ and His grace are at work in our lives, as we are now joined to this resurrected Lord.

Bearing fruit is related to being joined to Christ. Initially, our union came about through humility and faith. We were humbled of ourselves and said, “Lord, I am a sinner. I need You. Forgive me. I put my faith in You to be my Lord and Savior.” And we were joined to this risen Lord Jesus Christ. And now as we continue to walk in faith, humbly depending upon the one to whom we have been joined, we can bear fruit to God.

Scripture explains this in one of the most profound and simple and beautiful and powerful ways in all of the Word of God. It describes how humility, faith, and all the work of the Lord Jesus Christ means that fruit can come forth in our lives, spiritual fruit, so long as we remain united to Christ— as all His sheep will.

4Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. 5I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. (Jhn 15:4-5)

Such a simple picture, but so eternally profound is this that we must take heed. It is simple to see how a grape vine and a branch relate together, bringing forth its fruit in its due time. This is such a beautiful picture and so simple. We can see it. One can watch it happen. One cannot see the mystery of it, but he can watch the effects of it.
There is a grape vine. The vine is bursting with the life. Then note the branches on it. If you take a branch away from that vine, it can do nothing, but if you let it stay connected, abiding there where the life of the vine can flow through the branch, you know it will bear fruit in due time. From the life in that grape vine, there are going to be grapes produced from the life of the branch. This is a fantastic picture and it makes this invisible, spiritual mystery so clear. Jesus is the vine. He is the life source. We are joined to Him. As we abide in Him, that life that is His flows through us. And the fruit that is like the life in the vine, Christ, comes out through our lives.

Now out of that relationship of abiding, depending, walking together, and looking to Him for life, we cannot produce those grapes. We can do things at times that look like we are. We can go through religious motions. “Hey, I am doing great with God. I read a hundred verses today.” But did you believe them? Did they touch your heart? “Hey, I am doing fine. I haven’t missed a service in twelve years.” Why do you go? “Well, got to get my attendance ribbon.” These are not the fruits of a life filled with the Spirit of God. These are wax fruits and worthless for all purposes save for display. They will never be able to nourish the body of Christ. One bite into a grape like that and you would surely choke. That fruit does not touch lives. That fruit does not glorify God. It stands as nothing but the merest of self-righteous religious activity.

But there is a fruit that we can have growing out of our lives. And it only comes from the life that is in the true vine—and from no other place. We do not need it to come from any other place. We are branches in that vine. Again, humility is involved. Jesus says humbling words to us. “The branch cannot of itself bear fruit.” Humbling words, but true! Jesus says that without Him no man can do anything to bear worthwhile fruit. Again: humbling, but true.
Maybe you are like me. Early on in the Christian faith, I read those words and they did not thrill me. They kind of provoked my flesh. Perhaps others could not bear fruit of themselves, but I was not others. Fortunately, through the years the Lord can really change your mind on things like that. He convinced me in many ways that He was right and I was wrong. Now I read this passage and my heart leaps!

The branch cannot bear fruit of itself. Now I recognize happily that of course it could not. Learning that was hard, but in the end, quite rewarding. Without Christ, we can do nothing. This serves to remind us to walk humbly before the Lord.

Humility is involved and as we have seen, God gives grace to the humble. But faith also is involved. “Abide in Me.” That is where our faith comes to meet our humility. That is our walk of faith. That is our attitude of dependence. Humility says, “I cannot.” Faith says, “He shall!” The life of the vine becomes our only hope. We are abiding in Him. We are connected to Him. We are looking to Him. We are hoping in Him. We are drawing life from Him. We are expecting that everything we need to have a fruitful life is already in the life that is in that vine. The promise to that trusting heart is, “You will bear much fruit.” Much fruit! Not just a little half ripened sour grape, but “much fruit” is the promise of Scripture.

In other words, great measures of Christlikeness in word and deed and attitude will grow in and through our lives—all because it is Him sharing His life with us. Just like the grape vine shares its life with the grape branches.

Bearing fruit is truly about the grace of God. It is about relating to the Lord Jesus Christ in a way that we do not deserve, in a way we could never cause to happen, and in a way we could never
sustain or maintain. But He is ready, willing, and able to provide that way and make that path real for us as we walk humbly with Him, admitting our need, walking in faith toward Him, counting on Him, believing what He said, not doubting Him, and taking Him at His word. As we embrace Him in this manner, we shall bear much fruit. The bearing of fruit is directly tied into living day by day by the grace of God.

**Good Works by Grace**

But the same is true about good works— one more reality in the kingdom of God that we too frequently disassociate from the grace of God.

Then they said to Him, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" (Jhn 6:28)

What a question! What activity, what work must we do that we might be involved in godly works— involved in the very works of God?

Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent." (Jhn 6:29)

The question is, "What can we do?" The answer is, "Who should you believe?" The natural thoughts of man are always what can I do? The heart of the kingdom requests belief in the work of Christ. That kind of trust leads to abundant doing. One who says they have faith and yet there are no works has no faith in God, of God, or from God. That is just human religious talk.
Yes, real faith does work. But to work the works of God is entirely dependent on true faith. Is there any special secret to embark on working the labors of heaven? “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.” They asked what they could do and Jesus answered, “Trust in and rely on the one the Father has sent into the world.” Faith is going to be at the heart of a life of good works, just as faith is at the heart of bearing fruit. Grace is behind both—grace that flows through a humble, trusting heart.

Living by grace does not produce a lazy, inactive, do-nothing life. Now, that does not mean that a life of faith might not have its inactive seasons. Note the life of Elijah. “Elijah, what did you do all day out there by the Brook Cherith? I mean, besides looking for the ravens and your next meal. Or counting the centimeters increasing on the bank as the creek dries up. What were you doing out there?” He was a man of faith. He was there obeying and trusting God. There are times like that. But before you know it, you might find yourself on top of Mount Carmel, calling down fire from heaven, exposing four hundred false prophets—pretty active business. Both were in faith though.

Faith is at the heart of it. But we cannot simply look for a Brook Cherith and say, “I am going to live the perfect life of faith,” and then simply relax. We cannot imagine that a life of prayer, worship, Bible study, and fellowship with the saints is the life of those of feeble faith. We cannot imagine that in our strength of faith we may simply abide where faith costs us little. It is a trick. It is a distraction from the enemy. Though those days might be part of our walk, they do not define our walk. They are not the whole thing.

Faith is trusting God in the most quiet of times. It is trusting God in the most chaotic of times. It is trusting God times of inaction. And it is trusting God when you are battling hard till you cannot
imagine possibly taking another step. “This is the work of God that you believe in Him, the One
the Father sent.”

Look how this began to work in the Book of Acts when the early church begins to live day by
day in His body—in His body connected in unity to the head. Similar to the branches to the vine,
we shall note the good works of Christ coming to fruit in the good works of His body.

And with great power the apostles gave witness to the
resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them
all. (Act 4:33)

The early church gave a powerful witness to the risen Lord Jesus. And it is tied in here to the fact
that great grace was upon them. The great and powerful witness of the Lord Jesus will always be
tied to a great demonstration of great grace upon someone’s life. It is a good work proclaiming
the witness of the resurrected Lord. And we should desire to be a part of that good work. But if
we desire to be a part of that good work, let us desire great grace to be upon our lives. It is one
thing to love to greatly proclaim Christ as the resurrected Lord, but humility must admit the great
need of His help. Look to the promises of the Lord, put your faith in His power to works good in
you, and you shall witness His grace move. That is how they lived in the early church.

This comes forth in a wonderful way in Acts chapter 14. Early on as a Christian, early on as a
pastor, back in the late 60s, a passage like this just came and went so fast. For many years now,
when verses like this come to the fore, I just have to stop and chew on them, enjoying their
weight and truth.
From there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they had completed. (Act 14:26)

From Italy, Paul and his missionary team came back to Antioch, from the place they had been sent out. The early missionary team returns to their home church. These men have finished with their journey. They are coming back. They are coming home to the home church and to God’s grace. They had gone out from Antioch some time earlier, traveling throughout the Mediterranean world, proclaiming the gospel of the risen Lord Jesus Christ and the grace of God in places that have never heard it. These men were venturing into dark enemy territory and establishing beachheads of light and truth and salvation. These were church planters in the most radical sense of the term. And we are told in Acts 13:1-2 that when they left Antioch, their home church, they were fasting and seeking the Lord in prayer. We are told here that from Antioch they had been commended to the grace of God. The church entrusts them to the grace of God. The church turns them over to the grace of God.

Note that they were granted grace “for the work which they had completed.” When we are commended to the grace of God, it will bring completed works in our life and walk. It is by this manner that the early church was extended, planted and built up.

We would not be today walking with the Lord Jesus Christ if there had not been those like the saints at Antioch, and those like Paul and Barnabas and Luke and others who went out, who were linked together in partnership to the grace of God for the work to be done. They went out in a step of faith. Surely their hearts must have been humbled with the impossibility of it— but they
were commended to the grace of God. And some weeks or months later they come back and the work had been completed.

Now when they had come and gathered the church together, they reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. (Acts 14:27)

See what happens when the grace of God is at work? When the grace of God is at work, things happen. They went out commended to God’s grace. They functioned out there with God’s grace actively involved in their lives.

We need to rid ourselves of the understanding that the grace of God is merely a benevolent attitude God has toward sinners such as we. Thankfully, His grace includes that, but His grace is far more than just a disposition of longsuffering kindness toward us. The grace of God is the active, powerful, moving, and working resources of God working on us, in us, and through us. That is how the early church was built. That is why we are here in Christ now. That is how we are to function day by day.

They were commended to the grace of God “for the work which they had completed.” When they got back to the church to give the full report, they spoke not about all they had done, but they instead reported all that God had done with them. They gloried in how God had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.

The grace of God is at work and God is Himself graciously working in and through our lives. These men of Antioch were the vessels through whom God brought light to the Mediterranean
world. Through them and by His grace God shined light into the darkness, bringing liberty where there were chains, forgiveness where there was guilt, and life where there was spiritual death. That is the grace of God at work. Living by grace produces lives and ministries and testimonies like those of Paul and Barnabas and Luke and others down through the ages.

Ephesians 2:10 gives a wonderful description of this. Building off the truth of salvation by grace spoken of in verses 8 and 9, Paul continues by describing the grace of God as working further unto the good works of its objects.

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works. (Eph 2:10)

Of course we are saved by grace through faith, not of works; however, we are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works. We are not saved by good works. But we are saved for good works. And as we are saved by grace, it is that very grace of God that lets us walk in these good works.

We are His workmanship. The great work that is being done in our lives is first by God upon us and in us; and that is what leads directly to our good works. We were created in Christ Jesus. We were brought out of Adam. And as we are brought into Christ, a new life was created. We were brought out of death and guilt in Adam to life and forgiveness in Jesus Christ. Created in Christ Jesus for this purpose, for good works.

It is the plan of God, the will of God, that your life and mine abound with good works. But we are not under law but under grace. No, we are created for good works which God prepared
beforehand and it is not by adherence to the works of righteousness that these good works will come about; rather than producing good works through disciplining ourselves to do good works, such righteous deeds will flow naturally from the life submitted to grace. The works that you and I are to be involved in, God has already prepared them before we came to Him. And He has prepared us from before the foundations of the world to walk in those good works.

We are saved by grace, not by works. But we are saved for good works and God already has them ready for us if we shall just walk by faith. If in humble dependence, we shall walk with the Lord in this life of grace, we will be walking in the good works that God has before prepared. The good works are there to be taken ahold of in faith by grace. We do not have to imagine them. We do not have to create them ourselves. We do not have to form and shape them. We merely live by faith and in so doing, we shall naturally walk in them.

And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work. (2Cr 9:8)

Note that God’s grace is here tied to an abundance of good works. And note as well, God is able. Walking by the grace of God, living it out day-by-day, hinges on the ability of God. A life of good works is not dependant upon our strength, our power, or our resolve. It hinges on His ability alone. And God is able.

A humble heart reads this and is comforted; it knows that by its own power, it can do nothing to work true good. God makes all grace to abound toward His children. Sometimes we wonder about grace. We wonder if we will be given enough to do what we must do. This is the wrong
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Living Daily by the Grace of God

perspective. “And God is able to make all grace abound toward you.” This word, abound, is one used to describe the abundance of waves, rolling and crashing upon the seashore; just as such waves are powerful and overwhelming, so is the grace of God. There we stand and God is able—able to make all grace abound unto us. Will we receive it? Will we believe it? Will we count on it? Will we depend on it? Will we humbly say, “That is exactly what I need”? Are we running frantically up and down the beach paying no attention to the waves of grace? Too often we scurry around, imagining that we are building some mighty thing for God. This is the great myth of so much of our earthly works.

God is able to make all grace and all kinds of grace as well as any measure of grace, abound toward you and me. We shall always have sufficiency for all things no matter the need; we shall always have an abundance of grace available to us for every good work.

This truth here applied here to material resources and sacrificial giving supports the heart of God’s gospel message. He is able in all things. The kingdom of God is built by grace upon grace through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. This can be applied any direction you want to go in the kingdom of God. Living daily by grace, we can expect a life of good works. Abounding grace is given for the purpose of abundant works. We should be expecting God to work an abundance of good works with our lives because abounding grace is granted us for the very purpose of abundant good works.

1 Corinthians 15:10, which John so appropriately reminded us of earlier, is Paul’s testimony about how this worked in his life. Note Paul’s testimony of God’s work of grace in his life.
But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. (1Cr 15:10)

Paul was an abundant laborer. He abounded in good works. God’s grace working through his life was astounding. He evangelized the nations. He made disciples of the children of God. He planted the seeds of the early Gentile church. He traveled as a missionary throughout the Mediterranean. When not accomplishing these deeds because of imprisonment in Rome, Paul wrote the Bible. He had an amazing life. By the grace of God, he had was used beyond imagining.

God’s grace is an active thing, not merely cutting us slack and granting us mercy, but working in our hearts and lives for good. The pouring out of His resources on and in our lives makes things happen. Our labors on our own behalf will certainly be in vain, but God’s grace toward us will not be in vain.

Look at this now: “I labored more abundantly than they all.” No one was more involved in good works in the early church than the apostle Paul. He labored. He worked more abundantly than all others. And then he surprises us with a testimony that staggers our thinking. “Yet not I.” None of his fantastic labors were of his own working; all is attributed to “the grace of God which was with me.” Paul’s life was filled with good works; yet, Paul was not the cause. He was neither the energy nor the drive behind such deeds. God’s grace, at work in his life, was the dynamic force. And so, Paul labored more abundantly.
Living by grace does not mean we will never breathe heavy or never have a drop of perspiration. Jesus always lived in dependence upon the Father in humility and faith; he sweated drops of blood. Suffering and labor are the way of the believer. Living daily by grace can at times mean astounding measures of labor.

But Paul, in another place, lets us know that the intensive activity in which he was involved was not a self-striving labor. For some, tough labor or difficult circumstance is anathema—something to be feared and fled. Imagine Jesus fleeing His own labor of grace in the Garden of Gethsemane. We would have no salvation. It can get tough at times. But look at this:

To this end I also labor. (Col 1:29)

To which end does Paul labor? From the previous verse we note that he labors for the proclamation of Christ Jesus. Paul then works to this end: getting out the message of Christ—warning and teaching every man about Christ. “To this end I also labored.” Paul labored. There is a work to be done. The more I have appreciated the grace of God through the years, the more I have found myself naturally laboring. Because I have found a greater resource in God than I had previously realized, God has worked through me to greater degrees than He had previously. God’s energy, not mine. God’s strength, not mine. God’s supply, not mine.

To this end I also labor, striving according to His working.

(Col 1:29)
The word for striving here is the word from which we get the English word, “agonizing.” Sometimes, in the midst of great ministry, service, and good works, there is a certain agony in it—an extensive strenuous expending of ourselves.

But notice what he says. “Striving according to His working.” There is the difference between striving and doing so according to His working. Striving according to His working is not fleshly striving. This is the grace of God at work. This is alternately rendered as “struggling with all His energy.” We are powered by the grace of God to work through these struggling efforts. This is the grace of God at work producing lives of good works. God wants us to walk in good works. He wants our lives filled with good works. But we can only properly do so by the grace of God.

**Obedience through Grace**

So then, our last issue for the evening: obedience. Much to my personal amazement, about twenty-one years ago, after I had been a Christian nine years, it began to dawn on me—my eyes and ears opened up by the Holy Spirit through the Word of God—that obedience is also a matter of the grace of God at work.

Remember, you are not under law but under grace. And though the law demands obedience, it cannot provide it. We want to walk obediently. It is critical that our life be in line with the will of God more and more. But here, like every place else, our lives are neither segmented nor compartmentalized. One part functions by grace while another operates by half grace, half law. A lot of us live that way. Obedience, many feel, is strictly an operation of law, a function of how well we discipline ourselves to work rightly. Maybe that is why we struggle so much and fall into disobedience.
We are not under law; we are under grace. Obedience also is a matter of grace, not law. Therefore it is also related to humility and then faith in Jesus Christ—faith in the one who once said, “I always do those things that are pleasing to the heavenly Father.” That one in whom we trust now lives in us. Christ in us, the hope of glory, always pleased the Father. Living in and through us, He can fully still please the Father now.

Philippians 2:12-13 offers brilliant insight into this issue of obedience. We are told here to “work out our own salvation with fear and trembling for it is God who works in us both to will and to do for His good pleasure.” Work out your own salvation. This is not saying work for your own salvation, for salvation is not of works. Yet we are saved unto good works. So this is about working out the saving grace of God in the life we live. Work out your own salvation. God has brought this salvation to you. He has delivered it into your life. By the saving grace of God, the life of Christ is in you. Salvation is your possession. Now work it out! God worked it in, now see that it flows out of our lives. Work out your own salvation.

But note how we are to do it: “With fear and trembling.” With neither pride nor arrogance, we should work our righteous deeds in fearful humility. Fear has to do with being awe-struck and amazed at God. Trembling marks uncertainty and humility, a sense of inadequacy. That is the way we are to live out what God has brought us.

“It is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.” Now, by “His good pleasure,” we are talking about obedience. “His good pleasure” is simply that which pleases
Him—that which He likes. It is that which He has told us to do; and when we walk in such a manner, it delights His heart.

Here again we see humility and faith. This is how we live day by day by grace: humility, fear, and trembling. We cannot handle it of our own strength. We need the might of the Lord on our side. This is fitting for it is God who works in us for righteousness. We can count on that. We can rest in that. We can move out on that in faith. God works inside of us to develop an obedient life. Holiness, godliness, Christlikeness: these are the mark of God’s work in us.

It is God who works in you. And look how extensively He works. He works in we who believe to will and to do. So many of us have assumed that once the will is there, we shall just go do it.

A picture in my mind came one day meditating on this verse. And seems to be that between the willing and the doing, there is a huge spiritual black hole. And “jillions” of Christians have disappeared into it. They had the will to do it. “I want to please You, Lord.” This reminds us of the attitude of the children of Israel. They receive the law and all of Israel proudly proclaims, “All You have said, we will do.” Then the hundreds of years of history in the Old Testament document their tragic failure. They were willing. And yet they failed. They were missing something essential. This is what they needed: God working in them both to will and to do.

Jesus said, “The spirit is willing, the flesh is weak. So pray that you do not fall into that temptation. Pray. Depend on Me.” Being willing is only half the story. Of the twelve who said they would return, only two fulfilled their promise—ten into the black hole. They were certainly willing, but that is not the whole story. “God, I am willing. Oh, keep working in me, Lord; do not let me just run off on will power. I am willing, but I need you to keep working in me, Lord. I am
going about this thing with fear and trembling. Keep working in me until the doing is as full as the willing.”

That is the life that increasingly walks in the good pleasure of the Father.

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

There it is—obedience related to grace. The grace relationship with Jesus Christ works in the humble, trusting heart. Now, may the God of peace do this in us; may he make us complete. May he make us complete in every good work unto the end of His glorious pleasure and good will. May His work in us cause us to rejoice to do His will. God works inside of our lives, in our mind, emotions, our will, and our energy. God is working in us what is well pleasing in His sight. An obedient life is tied into the relationship of grace with Jesus Christ that flows to humility and faith.

16 Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, 17 comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work. (2Th 2:16-17)
What do you think would be written over your life if God Himself established your life in every good word and deed? Good word and work? You would say, “That there is a Christian life; that is the life of one who obeys God in what they say and what they do.” Notice, may the Lord Jesus and the Father comfort your heart and establish you with that good hope by grace.

Do you have a good hope that your life is going to be more and more established in every good word and work? Are you confident that in the things you say and the things you do, you are more and more going to be stabilized in an obedient walk? Do you have a good hope for that? Here is the good hope—the good and solid hope of grace.

A good, confident expectation that in word and deed you can obey the Lord more and more can be aided by praying this benediction over your own life and the life of those to whom you minister: “Lord God, please establish us of Yourself. We are counting on good hope by grace. Please stabilize us in every good word and work.” Good hope by grace establishes lives in obedience.

To Conclude

In conclusion, in living daily by grace, God works in us; and God works with us by His grace for fruit, good works, and obedience. A great and benedictory response of humility of faith to God’s grace for daily living is our final Scripture for this session.

20Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us,

21to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. A men. (Eph 3:20-21)
Oh, may all this glory go to God because this is God at work. Are you asking God for a life of fruit and works and obedience? God is able to far surpass anything you ask or think; and He does it according to the power that works in us, the very power of God—His grace at work. That is why He ends up getting the glory and not us. We receive blessing to be sure. His grace can be dumbfounding. May it be so in our lives, as we humbly trust Him to pour out His grace upon us for lives that bear fruit, abound in good works, and increase in obedience.

**Closing Prayer**

Father, we marvel over Your plan. We rejoice over Your resources. We are so blessed. We are so rich. How good You are! How great You are, Lord! We call upon Your name. We humble ourselves before You. We need You. And by faith, we say that we trust on You. Do these things in and through us, Lord. Amaze us. Do exceedingly and abundantly beyond anything we could ever imagine. And may You get all the glory as Your grace brings it to pass. We pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.
Growing in the Grace of God

Lesson 4
The Holy Spirit and the Grace of God

By
Bob Hoekstra

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Opening Prayer

Father, we give You thanks. We give You praise and glory. We give You honor. We also come humbly before You admitting our great need for You. Not simply a partial need, Lord, but a comprehensive, deep, constant, and daily need. Thank You that You give grace to the humble. And so we humble ourselves before You and ask that You would pour out Your grace in mighty measures today. Graciously speaking to us. Graciously touching our hearts. Graciously working in us to will and to do according to Your good pleasure. And graciously, transforming our lives to the image of Jesus Christ. By Your Holy Spirit, unfold Your Word and make it alive to us. And Lord, we confess that we can only live by every word that proceeds from Your mouth. So speak to us. We are ready to hear what you have to say. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Introduction

The fourth study in the series Growing in the Grace of God, is about the Holy Spirit and the grace of God. This session builds on the foundation of the previous study on living daily by the grace of God. Last time we addressed the question, “How do we live day by day by the grace of God?” This study will provide another perspective in answering that question. This second angle is that the Holy Spirit must be at work in us and on us and through us applying the grace of God to our personal lives. There is a very profound relationship between the Spirit of God and the grace of God.

This is first seen in Zechariah 4:6, 7. The Scripture here demonstrates the correlation between the God’s Spirit and His grace:
So he answered and said to me: "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the LORD of hosts. 7'Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain! And he shall bring forth the capstone with shouts of "Grace, grace to it!""

(Zec 4:6-7)

The work of the Spirit of God relates directly to the grace of God. It is impossible to walk in the grace of God without the work of the Spirit of God. Whenever the Spirit of God is at work in us, it is the grace of God that is being provided. The word of the Lord to His people was, “Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit.” The Holy Spirit must be the dynamic agent in the work of building Christ’s church. This Scripture references a time when Zerubbabel was leading the people back from captivity into the Promised Land so that they would rebuild the temple of God. This act was to be done not by the might and power of man, but by the work of the Holy Spirit.

Today, we are the temple of the Living God. The building up of the church—the building up of our lives—is not by our might or power, but by the work of the very Spirit of God.

In Zerubbabel’s day, the task of rebuilding God’s temple seemed to be like a great mountain because of the hostile and alien environment. Yet this was not God’s intention. The word of the Lord to Zerubbabel was that this mountain would become a plain. It would become a flat place to march across when God was through with His task. And then ultimately, Zerubbabel would bring out the capstone—the last stone for the temple. With that final piece set in place, the only proper response that explained the whole work of God building the temple was, “Grace, grace to it!”
The same may be said in regards to our lives. We must be built by the work of the Holy Spirit. When that last piece is put in place in our lives and in the life of the church before she is raptured, what can be said about that process? “Grace, grace to it!” As John says in his Gospel (1:16), it is “grace upon grace,” which we have already looked at. That is the way that God works in our lives. He works by grace. “Of His fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.”

The New Testament also links the grace of God with the work of the Spirit of God:

Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.”

(Luk 22:20)

This is seen in the Lord’s Supper. The cup speaks of the blood of Jesus Christ. It also speaks of the new covenant, that is, the new arrangement for walking with God. This is the new covenant of grace! The old covenant was the Law of Moses. Ephesians makes it clear that the shed blood of Christ was a work of the grace of God:

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace (Eph 1:7)

When the Christ shed His blood for us, He was actually purchasing for us the new covenant—a new arrangement between God and us. It is here that we are told when He was shedding His blood for the forgiveness of sins; it was according to the riches of God’s grace. This new covenant is a covenant of grace. It is what we have been looking at in these studies together.
This theme of the new covenant is also addressed in 2 Corinthians 3:5, 6. It is here that we can see the necessary involvement of the Holy Spirit in this new covenant of grace.

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

Those who are in Christ through faith are servants of the new covenant. We addressed this in our second study, “The Grace of God.” We cannot build a life with God through our best efforts to live up to the law of God. We begin and maintain a relationship with Him through the His grace. That is echoed here in these words. It is not on our own sufficiency that we can come before God. We cannot serve God by our own sufficiency. We are simply insufficient to live up to his standards because they are perfect. In fact, we are not sufficient of ourselves as verse 5 declares, “to think of anything as being from ourselves.”

This is reminiscent of John 15:5 where Jesus said, “Apart from Me you can do nothing.” It seems as though we and as well as the unsaved are able to do so much. This is true, yet it amounts to nothing. People are able to do great works of art, make discoveries, explore, travel, theorize and impress one another, however, none of that can save a soul, transform a life, prepare anyone for glory, or let them be used now for the glory of God. The things done apart from Christ amount to nothing. “Apart from Me you can do nothing.” There are so many busy things, but they always amount to nothing outside of Christ.
Paul’s words, “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as coming from ourselves”—are words of humility. We have already discussed humility and faith because they are both at the heart of living by the grace of God. The humility is that our sufficiency is not enough. The faith is based on our sufficiency being from God. Ultimately, we do not have what it takes, but fortunately, He does! What we have to do is humbly confess our insufficiency, and—by faith—trust in His sufficiency. That is how we are sufficient servants under the new covenant. It is not of the letter as there are no rules to obey, because it is the Spirit—a very person of the Godhead—who works in us.

Let us not underestimate the statement, “The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.” For this is an issue of life and death. This point is not merely an interesting piece of doctrine. It is a matter of life and death. Living by the letter will kill us, because our best efforts fall short of the law that needs to be kept. The letter says that we do not measure up. We are incompetent in satisfying the law. Thankfully the Holy Spirit gives life. The Spirit supplies the life that we need and so we are changed.

The new covenant is lived out daily in humble dependence on the Holy Spirit. The Spirit supplies the sufficiency of the grace of God in our lives.

Again, the Holy Spirit and the grace of God correlate quite well. Where the Spirit is involved, the grace of God is found and vice versa. When we need grace, it is through the Holy Spirit. When we want the Holy Spirit to work, He works in delivering the grace of God.

Life Given by the Spirit
If we desire to live daily by the grace of God we must have the Holy Spirit working in our lives. Initially, we must receive spiritual life from the Spirit of God through His grace.

Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. (Jhn 3:5-6)

The life of flesh is unable to inherit the kingdom of God. Every person on earth has been born through the flesh— that is, a natural human birth by human resources. That life cannot go into the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of God is populated by those who are children of the family of God through new birth. This new birth is a new life by the Spirit. That which is born of the flesh is flesh. It will never change. It may possibly become religious, or zealous and dedicated. It may even want to turn over a new leaf, yet when it turns over the new leaf, underneath is more flesh. That which is born of the flesh is flesh. Our flesh cannot be perfected, therefore instead a new flesh, we need a new life.

And we receive that new life by the Holy Spirit. When we believe that Jesus died for us and call on the name of the Lord, confessing our sin and our need for salvation and forgiveness— by God’s grace— the Holy Spirit brings us new life in Christ. A new birth!

This is augmented with Jesus’ statement in John 6:53 which states, “you have no life in you.” He is speaking here of spiritual life. No eternal life. Nothing that can relate to God. All that exists of ourselves is our physical existence. Only ten verses later Jesus states that “it is the Spirit who gives life.” Again, this brings us back to the point of humility and faith. Not having any life in us
is a humbling word. We are simply unable to supply the type of life that is necessary for knowing, walking and serving God. Let us now consider the faith aspect, for we see that it is “the Spirit who gives life.” Our assurance must be placed in God for this, and not our inadequate selves.

**Walking According to the Spirit**

So we see that the Spirit does this work of new birth, but it does not stop there. Our continual day-by-day spiritual life must be supplied by the Holy Spirit. Consequently, it is vital for us to be walking according to the Spirit. In the book of Galatians there are so many great revelations about the work of the Spirit, and Galatians 5:16 gives us insight regarding walking according to the Spirit.

> I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. (Gal 5:16)

We should not indulge the natural and base cravings of the human flesh. Rather, we should be walking in the Spirit. This means that we take every step of every day in dependence upon the Holy Spirit. That is what will give us that confidence that we shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. Every day in every way, every step, every issue, should be faced with hope and confidence because of the Holy Spirit at work in our lives.

> But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. (Gal 5:18)
We should be guided by the Spirit of God on a daily basis. This encapsulates all aspects of our lives. We need to be led by the God’s Spirit. Once that is taking place, we will no longer be under the law on a practical and experiential basis. Being led by the Spirit is not a set of rules to follow, but it is following God as He works in our lives.

Paul states in Romans 6:14 that we are not under law but under grace. When we do not walk in accordance with God’s Spirit— not being led by the Spirit— we are instead being led by our own will and resources, and therefore put ourselves back under the law. When we do this we have to live up to the commands and demands and standards of God on our own best effort. This is not what God had intended for us. When we are led by our flesh it will always result in failure. So let us be led by the Spirit, every step, every day— learning to be led by Him.

\[22\text{But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering,} \]
\[\text{kindness, goodness, faithfulness, } 23\text{gentleness, self-control.} \]
\[(\text{Gal 5:22-23})\]

Though we have already touched upon the fruit of the Spirit, let us consider it once more. A daily fruitful life can only come by the grace of God. The word of His grace effectively produces fruit in our life. Note that it is also connected to the work of the Holy Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is not something we can muster up. Rather, it is the Spirit of God working the things of God through us. The fruit of the Spirit is what our lives should look like. They stand as a description of the life and character of the Christ.

If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. (Gal 5:25)
If we have found new life by the work of the Spirit in new birth, it should be our goal to also grow and serve daily by the work of the Spirit. Let us walk according to the Spirit.

Chuck Smith, pastor of Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa, wrote something that reminds me of this very truth. He wrote in *Why Grace Changes Everything* the following:

Paul opened his letter to the Galatians with the salutation, “Grace be to you.” He closed it with, “Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. A men.” His benediction takes on a rich depth of meaning in light of the letter’s sharp focus on the glorious grace of God. The grace of Jesus, not the law of Moses, was the Galatians’ greatest need. To walk in the power of His Spirit, not in the vain efforts of the flesh, was their calling.

(Smith, 217)

Chuck Smith is making the same point that we have been making in our study, and that is that the grace of God and the Spirit of God are both connected. The primary theme of Galatians is the grace of God, yet much of Galatians is dedicated to the work of the Holy Spirit. For example, Galatians encourages us to live daily by the work of the Holy Spirit, because that is the only way that the grace of God comes to bear on and in and through our lives.

Notice in these two parallel sentences, how Chuck Smith ties the grace of Jesus Christ into the power of His Spirit. He states, “The grace of Jesus, not the law of Moses, was the Galatians’ greatest need.” Then he restates it another way: “To walk in the power of His Spirit, not in the
vain efforts of the flesh was their calling.” It is the Holy Spirit, powerfully at work in us that applies the grace of Jesus into, upon and through our lives.

For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. (Rom 8:5-6)

Those who are living according to the flesh, live by drawing solely on their human resource. This takes place in areas like: thinking, deciding, acting, and relating. They are setting their mind on the things of the flesh. In other words, they are putting their attention on things like their own will, glory, and sufficiency.

Now on the other hand, those who are walking according to the Spirit, day by day, step by step, they’re looking to the resources and work of the Spirit of God. They set their mind on things of the Spirit. They set their mind of God’s will, God’s glory, God’s grace, which is our sufficiency.

Paul then contrasts the carnally minded with the spiritually minded in verse 6. The choice is life or death. Sometimes along the way, people have said to me in some of these studies, “Now wait a minute, are you not just splitting theological hairs with things like law and grace? Is it all not just things of God to try to learn and get into?” I want to assure them that it is not just splitting hairs. But even if they are convinced it is, I still like to exhort them on this issue. If it is just splitting hairs, be sure and split the hair carefully. Because one side of that hair is death and the other side is life. That is how serious it is. “To be carnally minded [that is, flesh-resource thinking] is
death.” But “to be spiritually minded is life and peace.” We are not just discussing carpet color. We are choosing between life and death. That is how critical it is to understand law and grace.

On one hand, being carnally minded leads to spiritual death. It produces fear, doubt and selfishness. On the other hand, being spiritually minded leads to life. It produces faith, hope and love, which is evidence of God’s life at work in us. God desires for us to walk according to His Spirit.

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. (Rom 8:14)

If we desire to live as children of God, we need to be led by His Spirit. Those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. This is a daily life that gives evidence and indication of following the leading of the Holy Spirit. This is basically a child of God. The world has no interest in such things, but even if they did, they would not be able to do them. The world does not know the true and living God. Walking in accordance with the Spirit is vitally important to us if we want to grow in the grace of God.

**Being Filled with the Spirit**

It does not end with walking according to the Spirit only, but we also need to be filled with the Spirit. We are not only called to walk dependently upon the Spirit, but our lives should be overflowing with the work of the Holy Spirit as well. We are able to abound in the grace of God when our lives are overflowing with the presence and work of the Holy Spirit.
Ephesians 5:18 speaks of being filled with the Spirit. This is a classic imperative given through the apostle Paul.

And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, (Eph 5:18)

We may also translate this as, “be always being filled with the Holy Spirit.” The verb here is in the present tense. It encourages us to be filled all the time, everyday. Our lives are not to be controlled by things like human influences, wine and such, which dissipates and tears down our lives. On the contrary, we are to be filled with the Spirit.

So then what is the evidence of being filled with the Spirit? The Spirit works in different ways for different people. There is no standard or absolute regarding this.

Back in the mid-'70s I read a book entitled, Let’s Stop Fighting about the Holy Spirit. The author told a story about two blind men sitting on a bench. The amazing thing is that they were both healed of their blindness by the Lord. After speaking to one another they begin to realize that they both had a relationship with, an encounter with, and a touch of Jesus on their lives. They tell their testimonies to each other. One said, “Well here’s how I was healed. He just said, ‘Receive your sight!’ And I could see.” And the other blind man said, “Wait a minute. You mean no spit? No clay? No, ‘Go wash it off’? The first man replied, “No.” Then the second said, “Then you were not healed.”

We often measure God’s work by what we went through, instead of what the Word has to say. I was teaching at a family camp. Pastor Brian Roderson and I were both teaching and alternating.
The Lord led us—by His Spirit—to teach about the Spirit the first night. I taught about worshipping in the Spirit (Philippians 3:3). The next message Brian taught on being filled with the Spirit. And that afternoon I went to my room and I prayed, “Lord, that just stirred my heart. I want to get in Your Word. Show me some of indicators, the evidences, the signs, the expectations people can have if they are filled with the Spirit.” And I know that there are many more of them, but that afternoon, I was able to write down twenty-four different indications of being filled with the Spirit. Here in Ephesians 5:19-21 we see a great list of the results of being filled with the Spirit:

19 Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord,

20 giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, 21 submitting to one another in the fear of God. (Eph 5:19-21)

When you see someone walking in great submission and humility out of reverence for God, it is an evidence of the full work of the Spirit of God in their lives. These are tied directly in to being filled with the Spirit.

This is also the key to what is discussed in the later in the chapter regarding marriage. Ephesians 5:22 speaks to the wives:

Wives submit to your husbands as to the Lord. (Eph 5:22)

Then Ephesians 5:25 addresses the husbands:
Husbands love your wives just as Christ loved the church.

(Eph 5:25)

However, it does not just end there:

Children, obey your parents in the Lord. (Eph 6:1)

Then Paul continues:

You fathers do not provoke your children to wrath but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. (Eph 6:4)

Then Ephesians 6:5 goes on to talk the employee, and Ephesians 6:9 to the employer. The most extended explanation of Spirit-filled living is Ephesians 5 and 6. This tells us how to live at the church, at home, and on the job.

Too many of us—too often—have forgotten that the fullness of the Spirit is for daily living at home and on the job. Every one of us needs God’s grace at home and at work. The grace of God is practical. And we are to be filled with it. That is, we are to be being filled with the Spirit.

If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him! (Luk 11:13)
God, the Father, will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him. Not only does this apply to salvation, but also to sanctification. If the Spirit of God is not in our lives, then we are not born again. As we humbly ask the Lord Jesus for forgiveness and new life—admitting our need—the Father will send the Holy Spirit with new life.

Unfortunately, many Christians fail to apply this verse in regards to sanctification. We all, as Christian, have the Holy Spirit, but the real question is whether or not the Holy Spirit have us? The fullness of the Spirit means that He totally has us. That is, He has the room to work in every area of our lives. We who have the Spirit can ask the Father to send the Spirit’s full work upon us, which the Scriptures speak in Acts 1:8 and elsewhere.

The fullness of the Spirit is a work of the grace of God. That means that it cannot be bought, earned, or conjured up. We must simply ask. The asking is humility and faith.

Paul prays a great prayer, Ephesians 3, related to the fullness of the Holy Spirit. There are two great prayers in Ephesians: chapter 1 and chapter 3. When we come across these prayers, we should not be reading them only, but also praying them ourselves.

16Would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man,

17that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love,

18may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—

19to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge.

(Eph 3:16-19)
This prayer is directly related to being filled with the Spirit! If we seek the Lord in such a prayer, we can expect that our lives will more and more characteristically be filled with all the fullness of God. If we ask anything according to His will, we have been heard and we have the requests that we ask. There is no safer prayer than to pray directly out of the Word of God, for it is the very will of God. Some people say that they never know what to pray about. The Word of God is a great place to start.

Another wonderful description of the fullness of the Spirit is found in John 7. God used these verses to change my life back in the early ‘70s. I was struggling as a Christian being under the letter. It was damaging other people’s lives by telling them what to do and not how to do it. This is where God touched my life mightily on this issue of the fullness of the Spirit.

37 On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. 
38 He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." 39 But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. (Jhn 7:37-39)

Once the Son of God would be back at the right hand of the Father, the Spirit could be poured forth. Jesus is speaking about the how one can enter into that fullness. It is very simple, yet subtle. “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink.” If anyone has a spiritual need, bring that one to Jesus. “Let him come to Me. And then drink.”
How do you drink of Jesus Christ? Basically the same way you would a glass of water. You come to a glass of physical water to quench physical thirst, and you take it believing that it will meet the need. So if we bring our spiritual thirst to Jesus—believing that He will meet the need—then that is drinking. That is exactly what the next verse says.

38 He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. (Jhn 7:38)

If we believe that Jesus can quench the thirsts in our lives—that is, meet the needs in our lives, for example, fulfilling the yearnings and insufficiency—then that is drinking of Him by faith. If we keep doing that—if we characteristically do that—it is assumed that that will quench the thirst. If you are thirsty, come unto Jesus and drink.

But it goes far beyond that. He who believes in Christ—or keeps believing that Christ can meet those needs—out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water. This is a picture of bringing our need to the Lord in faith. He gives to us a thirst-quenching drink of the Holy Spirit, and not only does he meet our needs, but he builds us up in living water so that we would overflow onto the lives of others.

Many years ago, I told the Lord that I would serve and minister by His grace and the work of His Spirit. By consistently coming to Christ, he quenches and satisfies me with living water. When I concentrate on Him, He fills me till I overflow. This is the best way to minister because we are so full of the living water of the work of the Holy Spirit. We can continue to come back to Jesus and He continues to pour living water into us, and so we simply overflow on other people. This could
be translated “gushed torrents of living water.” That is such a beautiful picture because someone can come up to us being so dry and weary, but we can help. God will refresh that person because of the living water that is overflowing from us. That is the work of the Holy Spirit!

**To Conclude**

The abundant grace of Jesus Christ meets our needs by this overflowing grace, which also touches the lives of others. This is the abounding grace of God overflowing in our lives by the deep work of the Holy Spirit upon us and in us. The Holy Spirit and the grace of God are absolutely linked together. We can live daily by the grace of God by the work of the Spirit in us, upon us and through us.

There are three warnings in conclusion: do not resist the Spirit, do not quench the Spirit, and do not grieve the Spirit.

First, in Acts 7:51, Stephen was speaking to the leaders of Israel and says, “You do always resist the Holy Spirit.” They were self-righteous, self-willed and self-sufficient. They resisted what the Holy Spirit wanted to do. Let us not follow in their footsteps, because we cannot resist the Spirit and have lives abounding in the grace of God.

Second, in 1 Thessalonians 5:19, Paul writes, “Do not quench the Spirit.” Quenching the Spirit is closely related to resisting Him. When we will not respond to His Word, His convictions, His moving, then we are quenching the Spirit. We are—in a sense—suppressing with blanket of the flesh that which He wants to do in and through us. Let us not quench the Spirit. Also in quenching the Spirit we also quench the work of the grace of God.
Third, Ephesians 4:30 says, “Grieve not the Holy Spirit.” The Holy Spirit is a person, not a power. He does have power, but He is not a power. He is not heavenly electricity, but the very Third Person of the Godhead. And He can have a heartache over the people of God.

The following verses, 31 and 32, speak of bad words and bad attitudes among Christians. These things grieve the Spirit of God. We cannot walk in the fullness of the Spirit if we are grieving the Him. God’s grace is available to abound in our lives, but it can only come by the full work of the Holy Spirit.

Let us consider an illustration that demonstrates how this works in a real-life situation. Let me again quote from a story out of Chuck Smith’s book, *Why Grace Changes Everything*. What a classic work of the Spirit this was. Chuck Smith says that a friend of his left his wife, and the wife called Chuck and asked if he would go and talk to this man.

I agreed to go and found my friend living in a shabby garage apartment on the bad side of town. When I saw his filthy little home, I was struck by how much he had lost... As I looked around at my friend’s new life I thought, *Oh God! How could he give up so much for so little?*

My heart was breaking because I loved this man. The sight of what he had fallen into tore me apart. I found myself unable to conceal my feelings, and much to my embarrassment I began to weep... I finally got so embarrassed I said, “I’m sorry I just can’t talk right now.” I got up, left, and went home feeling like a fool.
Here my good friend’s wife wanted me to visit him and make an appeal for reconciliation, and all I could do was sit there and cry.

The next morning, I received a phone call with news that left me in shock. My friend had returned to his wife and family just hours after my visit.

What did God use to achieve this miraculous healing of a fractured relationship? Not a holier-than-thou attitude, to be certain. His Spirit had created in me a spirit of meekness and brokenness that led to a joyful reconciliation. I thought I had blundered terribly— but I discovered that whenever we choose to walk in the Spirit, God delights to work powerfully in stunning and unexpected ways. (Smith, 80)

That is the testimony of the grace of God at work. It is a testimony of walking in the Spirit, and being filled with the Spirit. The Spirit of God was grieved over that situation and expressed it through his sobbing and tears that is through Chuck’s crying.

We often would want to enter a situation like that with boldness similar to Elijah. We would like to tell that man to get back home or we will call down lightening! But things do not often work the way that we would like them to. We would have such a great word from the Lord that the man would run home to his wife. Chuck was so broken-hearted that he wept. He thought that he had blown it terribly, but this was not the case.
When we walk according to the Spirit—when we are filled with the Spirit—what is of God and on the heart of God, will overflow our lives. What looks like foolishness can change lives completely.

It is critical to see the union between the Holy Spirit and the grace of God. We cannot have one without the other. God wants us growing in His grace, and this must take place by the work of the Holy Spirit in, upon and through our lives.

Closing Prayer

Father, we thank You for Your great and abounding grace. Thank You that Your Holy Spirit is there to explain and to deliver the grace of God. Lord, for any among us who do not know the Lord Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and have not had new birth by the Spirit of God, stir their hearts even right now to say, “Lord Jesus, forgive me, a sinner.” By Your Spirit send them new life. For all of us who might—in any measure—need a new filling, Lord we humbly ask You to fill us again. Fill us so that we would overflow. We bring to You, Lord Jesus, our thirsts, needs and yearnings. We believe that You can meet them. Quench our thirst by Your Holy Spirit, and continue to do this work as we believe in so that You would fill us with living water that it might flow out to others who need a touch from You. Lord, let us not desire to resist, quench or grieve Your Spirit. We pray that you would work by Your Spirit in our lives. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.
Growing in the Grace of God

Lesson 5
Grace for Knowing God

By
Bob Hoekstra

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Opening Prayer

Lord, we humbly come—needing You, hungry for You, and thirsty for Your truth. We pray that You would keep working in our lives and humbling us before You. Nurture our faiths. Give us more reason to trust You, to count on You, to believe in You, to hope in You, and to expect You to work. So we come to Your word that way, humbled under Your mighty hand and expecting greatness in the glory of your word. Teach us. We also ask You to build us up in the faith. Strengthen us. Encourage us. Prepare our hearts to acknowledge the need for changes in our lives; may we humble ourselves, admit the need, face the need, and take joy in Your grace as it works mightily. By the work of Your Holy Spirit, guide us in Your truth we pray. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Introduction

Welcome to the fifth session in our series of studies on, Growing in the Grace of God, entitled Grace for Knowing God. God’s grace is available to us in order that we might get to know God better and better and better.

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace. (Eph 1:7)

The shedding of the blood of Jesus Christ provides forgiveness for sin. That is all a part of the riches of the grace of God. God is very rich in grace. No matter our employment of His grace, it remains undiminished. We have not drawn on the bank of heaven, the resources of grace, until
they are kind of low and depleted—they are undiminished! The riches of His grace are keynote in the command of Christ's shed blood. God's grace for us is seen in that death of Jesus Christ.

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. (Eph 2:13)

By this shed blood of Jesus Christ we are given the opportunity of an intimate relationship with God. While once we were far off from God, separated greatly from Him by our sins, now through the shed blood of Jesus Christ we have been brought near—near enough to talk to God and to listen to God and to fellowship with God and to walk with God.

**Getting to Know God**

We shall see in part of our study, that the intimacy available between the Lord and us is absolutely astounding. It goes beyond anything that could possibly develop on even the human level—even in the marriage relationship where two become one. Even though husbands and wives in Christ are a picture of Christ and His bride, the church, there is something unique about the relationship we can have with the Lord Jesus Christ. I mention this to remind us that we are still dealing with the grace of God and the grace of God has brought us close—close to God where we can really get acquainted with Him.

But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. (2Pe 3:18)

God's grace and knowing God: they go together. “Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” We are to grow in grace—in the understanding of it and in the
experiencing it. And we are to grow in knowing the Lord. The more we know about the grace of God, the more we know about one of the great, great truths of our Lord God. He is a God of grace.

But it is not only learning about grace that lets us know God better, but it is the fact that the grace of God is at work in our lives that allows us to know Him better. Not just understanding grace, but recognizing God’s grace at work, opens our hearts, opens our eyes, and opens our minds to a fuller knowledge and relationship with Him.

“Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” God’s grace and knowing God go so beautifully together. In fact, we shall see that the highest use of God’s grace is that we may grow in the knowing of Him. There is no greater way to appropriate the grace of God than to use to know better the Lord of our salvation.

And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. (Jhn 17:3)

What would we say if someone asked us, “Tell me, what is eternal life? Define it for me. Describe it for me.” Most simply, we might answer that we shall forever miss hell and forever we get heaven. That is good. But it does not get at the heart of it. That is not wrong. But it is not eternal life itself. Everlasting heaven is certainly included. Eternal life is really so much more. Just going on and on in existence forever—that is not eternal life.

Forgiveness of sins is also involved but is not the heart of eternal life either. Jesus tells us, “This is eternal life.” This is eternal life. He doesn’t merely say, “This is included in eternal life.”
According to the very Son of God, eternal life is that they, people of God, might know God the Father, the only true God, and His Son who was sent. Coming to intimate acquaintance with God is what eternal life is all about. Building an on-going friendship and acquaintanceship.

Too many Christians, after meeting God, do not grow in acquaintanceship with God. And for some reason modern Christianity has become for too accepting of this trend, as if it were the norm. God never intended us to meet Him in salvation and then be strangers until we stand before Him in glory.

The marriage relationship is to picture the relationship between Christ and His bride. A man and woman do not marry and then go through life happily apart for years at a time, visiting only frequently enough to come to a vague recognition and catch up on the latest news. No, marriage involves really, really getting to know each other as servants. We should be filled with the Lord’s Spirit, abounding in grace, and serving one another while coming into intimate knowledge of the Lord.

Just as the Lord Jesus Christ is not accusing us all the time, putting us down, condemning us, using us, and wringing the life out of us, neither should we react so amongst one another. He came, the King of Kings, to be the servant of all. Therefore, we ought serve in grace as well—for a servant is not greater than his master.

This is eternal life: knowing God. Just like a marriage is all about knowing our mate, so our relationship with God is a relationship of knowledge. We know our mates in order that by knowing them, we would bless them (not simply to use them). So it is with God. We come to know Him in order that we might bless Him. We never come to Him, asking to know that we
might use Him; when we truly know Him we will, rather, seek to be used by Him. “This is eternal life, that they might know You, God the Father and the Son who was sent.”

Just as it would be tragic, pathetic, and heart-breaking for two people to unite in marriage and then never get acquainted after that, so the tragedy would be magnified by operating such in our marriage to He who is infinitely worthy of love. We are the bride of Christ. We met Him when He called us to His side. Our sins were forgiven and new life was ours. We were brought into the family. We were introduced to the Lord God Almighty. This is what eternal life is all about—“that they may know You.” Coming to know God in intimacy is the purpose and drive of eternal life.

As God is of infinite depth of character, it will take the entirety of eternity to appropriately get acquainted with the Lord God Almighty. Therefore, what better purpose for that life eternal?

Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord. (Phl 3:8)

Paul was willing to lose everything that would come between him and knowledge of Christ and the Lord Almighty. He counted it all loss. “The excellence of the knowledge of the Lord” could also be translated as, “the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.” In other words, there is no value in any thing, person, or activity that obstructs one’s knowing of Christ for He is the most worthy of our focus. The inherent value of knowing Christ passes far beyond anything else life has to offer. This is life’s highest priority. There is nothing that measures up to this.
The highest use of God’s grace the effecting of growth in the knowledge of the Lord. This beautiful reality is held out in 2 Peter 3:18. This is the surpassing value in life. This is the greatest thing to invest the grace of God upon. Seek Christ daily in His word and through prayer that you may know him intimately.

Paul adds in Philippians 3:10, that the reason he counts all as loss is “that I may know Him.” This was the purpose, calling, and drive of the Apostle Paul. Recall Paul’s later words to the Philippian church:

13Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, 14I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Phl 3:13-14)

Paul said he did one thing in and with his life. In fact, Paul was a very busy man: evangelist, missionary, teacher, short-term pastor, church planter, maker of disciples, and a builder of leaders. He did all kinds of things: traveler, adventurer, and visionary. But in spite of all this, he says, “One thing I do.” He never mentions these here because all were related to that one central thing: getting to know the Lord.

That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him. (Eph 1:17)
This is a prayer for spiritual enlightenment unto a greater knowledge of the Lord. I pray that the Lord Jesus, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, would give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him. It takes a holy, heavenly spirit of wisdom and revelation to know God. We cannot figure God out on our own—this is a goal to which our abilities were never intended.

But He can reveal Himself and give us wisdom in knowing what He is like and who He is. We can teach us of His character, His works, and His ways. If God reveals Himself to us—if God gives us spiritual wisdom to understand Him—then we shall certainly get to know Him. We cannot get to know God any other way. Again, this is the grace of God at work. Again, this is the Holy Spirit at work.

God has been building us in our faith and knowledge since our conversions; that is likely why you are interested in this study. The Lord has been revealing Himself to us, giving us wisdom and understanding Him. And this serves to make us hungry for more. Getting to know God, we are to grow in it. It is what eternal life is all about. It can become, and should, the one passion that drives our entire lives. And we can consistently address God in prayer that He would let it be taking place. All of this is the grace of God.

**The Believer in Christ**

And how intimate, how close can we come in this knowing of God? The next focus of our study will be the phrase, “in Christ,” for in it much is revealed. Part of the intimacy of the relationship that is available to us is seen in this great phrase. Also, the resources and realities of the grace of God are unfolded in this reality—in Christ.
A gain, early as a believer, before I was pastoring, I never even noticed the phrase, “in Christ,” though I was beginning to read the Bible a lot and teaching Sunday school. Then I became a youth pastor. And then I was pastoring. And still I did not pay attention to this phrase. Oh how blind I was. This is one of the most glorious truths in all of the New Testament. It has great insight concerning the knowing of God.

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation. (Gal 6:15)

In Christ Jesus is where we now live and it also is how we now live. As certainly as a fish lives in the ocean and depends on the ocean, even so do we live in Christ and depend on Christ. Now seeing a fish in the sea is not that hard to do. You can see it. But we are called to walk by faith, not by sight. Relationships like this are even more powerful and more real and more significant than the relationship between fish and ocean could ever be. More real than any relationship evident to our eyes is the heavenly and eternal reality of our new and eternal recreation in Christ!

In Christ Jesus we now live. We cannot see Him. But we do indeed dwell in Him and take our identity in His life, death, and resurrection unto glory. God has told us in Scripture that is where we now make our habitation—in Christ Himself. That is how we live in, on, and by the life of Jesus Christ—the life shared with us just like the vine shares life with its branches.

Here is great truth: we are in Christ Jesus. He is our spiritual dwelling place. And right now He is sharing His life with us. By Him, life eternal is made ours. Through Him we shall continue to grow and flourish in the image of our Creator. Just like a branch lives by the life of the vine, we live in Christ and sharing His life. It is so glorious.
“In Christ Jesus, neither circumcision, nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation.”

Note the connecting and joining and contrasting words: neither, nor, and but. In Christ Jesus, neither circumcision, nor uncircumcision avails anything. For those of us who are in Christ, human circumstances, being circumcised or uncircumcised, or religious rituals and religious situations, mean nothing. With such rituals, one is no worse off for having taken part; but neither is he the better off for having abstained. Such avails nothing and causes no spiritual reality to become yours. It is in Christ that we benefit and not of human circumstances.

Then what does avail? What does matter? What does cause changes to take place? What does bring blessing? We who believe look to a new creation. One can be young, old, educated, uneducated, red, white, black, or black and blue, and such avails one nothing. Yet being created anew is the true gift of habitation in Christ. In Christ Jesus we are granted new life. We are born again. We are not the people we were before we came to Christ.

What matters in Christ? Being a new creation. Everyone in Christ is a new creature. This is the grace of God. It is the grace of God that you cannot get merits or demerits from all these human circumstances or religious conditions. All that matters with God is this: are you a new creation or not? If not, God will not do anything in your life. If you have come to faith in Christ, you are made new in Him. You are a new creature and He continually makes all things new. He builds the lives of the new creation to make them like Jesus Christ, His Son. What better use of grace?

How closely can we relate to the Lord? I’ve never gone through this experience for obvious reasons, but I’ve understood that mothers carrying yet to be born babies get very acquainted with those babies. Whether or not they hiccup. How much they move. Whether they stretch lightly or
whether they thump and kick. It is quite an intimacy there between a mother with child and the child. The baby is, after all, inside of her. That is pretty intimate. That is a pretty close relationship that she shares with that child. We are in Christ Jesus and as close as the intimacy between mother and infant, our relationship with Christ is so much closer. We are sharing His life. That is how intimately we can get to know Him. “In Christ” defines our relationship.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. (Eph 1:3)

Oh, how God has blessed us already—how fully! He has given us every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. Every spiritual blessing that heaven has to offer for life here on earth now is already ours in Christ Jesus. Whether we have come to experience and make use of every spiritual blessing or not, they are truly ours. The possessing of them and the experiencing of them are two different things. He is already blessed us with them. They are ours in Christ.

Too many of us know too little about what is already ours in Christ; and so, we have too little experience in these things. That is where we want to grow in knowing the Lord and become more acquainted with what God has already given us. Can we even comprehend that? That God has blessed us—past tense—with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

A man said one day when I was teaching this, “Brother, Pastor, but what I need is these blessings here on earth, not in heavenly places.” I said to him, “Brother, that is why we are connected to Jesus Christ. That is where the blessings are! And we can draw on those now and walk in them here on earth. Heaven is not four trillion light years away. Jesus said the kingdom of heaven is at
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hand! Where the King is, the kingdom is also. As we are in Christ the King, so Christ the King is in us as well. The kingdom is not way out there; Jesus said the kingdom of heaven is among us. Or it could even be translated, ‘within you.’”

The resources heaven offers that we need for living here on earth to the glory of God are as close to us as the Lord is. We are in Him. They could not be closer to where we are even in this moment! They are right there to draw on. Every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places is made ours!

This is expanded in verse 7. We are given this vast trove of riches “according to the riches of His grace.” God has forgiven us according to the riches of His grace. He wants to grow us up, to transform us, and to use us according to the riches of His grace. And all of these are a part of every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places—those are the riches of His grace. We are to draw on these. We have a tremendous bank account in heaven with our name on it. In it are the resources of the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

And in prayer and faith and service, in communion and fellowship with the Lord, we are to be drawing on that account daily. We cannot overextend the bountiful grace of the Lord. There is an infinite supply of grace to be had; it is never diminished.

Years ago in the days of the Civil War, there was a slave who, like virtually every slave, had a very, very difficult existence. Somehow, one day he came in possession of a signature of Abraham Lincoln. And for obvious reasons, like most of us, he loved and respected that man. He carried that signature of Abraham Lincoln with him everywhere he went. He loved to show it to people, so much did he love the man. He carried the signature of Abraham Lincoln right in his
pocket everywhere he went. This dear man did not know how to read, but many told him that was Lincoln's signature. They could tell. One day someone who could read looked closely at that signature and said to the slave, “Do you know what you have in your pocket?”

“Oh, yes! The signature of the man I love the most on the face of the earth and respect deeply. I’ve got his signature.”

And they said, “Oh, no, no, my friend. You’ve got far more than his signature. You’re carrying around a document for most of your life here, that set you free.”

Many a Christian is in that dilemma. We have been given already every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, but we do not know (or do not trust) what God has already given to us. Many Christians do not know what is theirs in Christ. They carry the Bible and love it dearly. But it is as though they are illiterate in some places of the Word—Ephesians 1:3 in this particular. God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. Are we drawing on those? If we do not know that verse, if we do not know that truth, if we do not know God that well, then we do not know how much grace is available. We will not be drawing on that grace. We might hold up our Bible, like that man living in slavery held up Lincoln’s signature. But do we know that we no longer have to live as slaves? We have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. The riches of the grace of God are ours. God wants us to know that. That is part of knowing Him. He wants us to live by these resources of grace—not for the indulgence of the flesh, but for the glory of God. He wants us to grow in the grace and the knowledge of the Lord.
Christ in the Believer

Look how this intimacy builds. It is not only us in Christ, but Christ in us. The end of Colossians 1:27 says the great mystery that God wants to reveal among the nations is, “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” This is not just Christ creating you. This is not just Christ coming to earth for you. This is not just Christ dying for you. This is not just Christ forgiving you. This is, however, Christ in you. Christ died for us that He might come to live in us. And living in us, He is our hope of glory.

We can know the Lord intimately. We live in Him, but He also lives in us. And He is our hope of glory. Living without hope, spiritually, is like trying to exist physically without oxygen. Hopelessness is spiritually smothering. We need hope. You know that we have a glorious hope. Our hope is a person and He lives in us. The more I study this the more it thrills me. The more I study it, the more I am staggered at the majesty of it. Christ lives in me? Can we believe it? The Father tells us time and time again in the Word that Christ lives in us. “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” What a tremendous thing.

Hope is not wishing. Good synonyms for hope in the New Testament include expectation, guarantee, confidence, and certainty. That is New Testament hope. Christ in us is our guarantee of glory. He is in us and we are going to make it to glory. We need to see glorious things take place now. Christ in us is our hope of glory. You want to give glory to God? Christ in you can bring forth glorious things that glorify God. Any way you look at it, we have a glorious hope. Our Creator, Redeemer, and our Firstborn Brother lives in us.

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live
You and I, who know Jesus Christ, have been crucified with Him. That person we were— that man of nothing but sin and guilt, nothing but alienation and separation— died on the cross with Jesus Christ when we were granted the faith to believe by the grace of God our Father. Here is the simple truth of the believer's life: “It is no longer I who live.” It is no longer just I in this life. The life that I had, died on the cross. The life I live now is no longer me living— so much better, it is Christ who dwells in me.

This is a mystery; this is a great truth unveiled at last by the words of the Apostle. “Christ lives in me.” Love to meditate on that. Be more encouraged and come to greater wisdom and greater revelation, apprehending the extent of Christ’s influence on the believer. The Creator of the universe, the Redeemer of men’s souls, lives in me!

“And the life that I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God.” We get up each morning trusting in Him. We face the things that confront us, trusting in Him. We go through the obvious and the perplexing and the unexpected, the routine and the impossible, all the while, trusting in Him. The Son of God, who loved us and gave Himself for our lives grows and develops us so that we might trust him daily and work unto righteousness by our knowledge of him.

The intimacy of these truths are staggering, mind-renewing, and faith-building. Christ lives in and through us. What riches of grace that is! It defies imagination that God would come to live in and through a person like any of the sons of Adam! Words to describe our joy for our position in
Christ slip and slide from our grasp. There is nothing like our relationship with Christ save for the Godhead itself: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

**To Conclude**

To conclude let Jesus remind us of how He lived on earth. It is so similar to the manner in which He longs for us to walk now in Him.

Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me?
The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works.

(Jhn 14:10)

I can still remember when God first caught my attention with that verse, and said, “Slow down. Sit down. Listen up.” I had always pictured Jesus, God the Son, visiting earth. How easy for Him to walk on water and raise the dead, He is God after all! I missed the whole point. Philippians 2 said He laid aside all those prerogatives. Not that He became other than God, rather He just did not exercise His deity. He became a servant. He was showing us how man should live with God. And as He trusted in God, He could say, “If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father.” So there is Jesus revealing how man should live perfectly while He is perfectly revealing who the Father is. The Father dwelling in Jesus did the works.

Do you know Jesus then takes that same truth and applies it to you and me? He does so as recorded in the Gospel of John
As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. (Jhn 6:57)

The living Father, the Father of life and light, sent the Son and He lived because of the Father. He did not live because He was the Son. He laid that independent generation of life eternal that belonged to His very nature aside to draw on the Father. “The living Father sent Me and I live”—He lived out His life on earth because of the Father. As with the Father and Christ, so it stands with Jesus and us. That is the parallel that Scripture holds forth. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me.

We do not live the Christian life because of us. Our resource is not me, myself and I. Our unfailing resource is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. If we shall feed on the Son like the Son depended on the Father, we shall live even as the Son lived on earth. Jesus depended on the Father; the Father worked through Him. We now feed on the Son; that is, we find our nurture and nourishment in the fruit of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection to glory for us. We believe in and count on Jesus Christ to be our all in all. We live because of Him. Just like the Father worked through the Son, so now the Son wants to work through us. He wants us to get to know Him in that same manner. As the very one who lives in us, Christ will glorify His Father by His work of redemption in us.

The veil has been pulled back. The children of God can live as lived the first Child of God. We depend upon Him the way He depended upon the Father. We do not have to be God to grow in godliness; we simply embrace godliness through grace even as Christ did. He fully depended on the Father. What a glorious life He had unto the Father. We can depend on Him.
2 Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, \(^3\) as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue. (2Pe 1:2-3)

The grace and peace of God can be multiplied toward our lives—multiplied in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. The more we get to know the Lord, the more His grace and peace are multiplied toward us. God has given us everything that pertains to life and godliness. We are already given all we need to live life God’s way and to grow in godliness. But how do we avail ourselves of all of that? How do we tap into all of that? How do we draw on that? Note verse 3, “through the knowledge of Him.”

The more we get to know the Lord, the more we draw on, and live by, all things that He is given that pertain to life and godliness. Knowing God is all about the grace of God and it is by grace that God even allows us to know Him. By understanding His grace, we naturally grow in knowing God He and rejoicing in God. And it is the grace of God at work on us, in us, and through us that make us to abound in the knowledge of the Lord. We are to grow in the grace and the knowledge of the Lord; they go together. They are a mutual growth experience and the highest calling we have on earth.

**Closing Prayer**

Father, we thank You for Your grace that has drawn us to You. Please work by Your grace, to help us to know You better and better. Work Your grace in and through our lives. Lord, by Your grace, for Your name’s sake, let us get to know You more and more. Thank You for revealing the amazing truth that we are in
You—and even more amazing, that You are in us. Unfold this for us. Let us live this way more and more. Remind us of these truths. Give us more and more of the life of Christ—a life lived in dependence on God above. Use us, Lord. Work in and through us. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.
Growing in the Grace of God

Lesson 6
The “Much More” Grace of God

By
Bob Hoekstra

Brought to you by
Blue Letter Bible
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Opening Prayer

Father, You are great. You are good. You are merciful and gracious. We love You and we are learning more and more it is based upon the fact that You loved us first. We thank You for Your grace that brought us into Your family. We love to learn and to grow in the grace that grows us up in Your family. So now in this final session together in this series, we ask that You would speak to us—clarify matters between You and us and Your great grace. Work in a deep and abounding way. Even in this moment, as we look at Your grace, may You pour out by Your Spirit of abounding grace upon our lives. We ask in Jesus’ name.

Amen.

Introduction

Study number six in our series, Growing in the Grace of God, is about the “much more” grace of God. The grace of God is much more than we yet know about it. And the grace of God is much more than we will ever need—not that our needs are not great, but His grace is that much greater.

Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. (2Pe 1:2)

Our last session dealt with the gift of grace for knowing God. God, by His grace, reveals Himself to us through His Word. Our primary and ultimate filter, by which everything else is measured, is the Word of God. And by His grace, He reveals Himself to us through His Word. God then brings His grace to bear upon our lives, in our lives, and throughout our lives, making the realities of His Word more and more our experience. That is growing in the grace of God by the grace of God.
Now getting to know God allows His multiplied grace to come to work upon our lives. “Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God.” Grace and peace in the Lord come via intimate acquaintance with God. God's grace is multiplied to us the more we get to know Him—not merely added to our lives, but multiplied to us.

This leads us into the matter of the “much more” grace of God. Though God has given much grace to us, if we will just press on to know the Lord, He will keep multiplying His grace to us. We will see there is so much more there than we had ever before imagined. This includes grace for victorious Christian living.

**Grace for Victorious Christian Living**

Christ leads us into victorious Christian living. This is a grace that works much more than merely upon our sin and death and defeat and inadequacy.

> For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. (Rom 5:17)

One man’s offense, Adam’s offense, allowed death and sin to enter into the entire family of man. That sin and death spread to all. That death immediately began to reign through the one, through Adam. And this fatal corruption is inherited through all of humanity’s relationship to Adam by natural birth.
Earthly living is so fraught with destruction and tragedy because death is reigning over humanity. Death is a tyrant dictator. Behind death is the one who came only to rob and to kill and destroy, the enemy himself. Over the world of the unredeemed, over every life, over us before we came to Christ, death reigned. Death even gives evidence of its work in our fear and doubt and self-centeredness and brutality and cruelty and selfishness and alienation and viciousness and perversion and prejudice. And so it goes: death ruling over the lives and affairs of humanity, ruling over all those who are related by natural birth to Adam and his sin.

The magnitude of spiritual death that influences humanity is enormous. Just think of the world around us. Devastation and heartache reign for death is sovereign of the lives of mankind.

But here is the glorious truth. There is a “much more” grace of God available. Death reigns over humanity and Adam’s seed because they only have natural birth. But for those who have new birth, for those who are in the family of God, there is a “much more” remedy, a “much more” solution. We will, for our purposes here, be calling this remedy, the “much more” grace of God. Romans 5: 17 talks about this abundance of grace and says that it is much more than is needed to meet the problems of Adam, his race and their sin, and death.

For all of us born in the natural line of Adam, death reigned over us, bringing doubt and fear and self-centeredness. The corruption of Adam brought disobedience to God, sin, death, and alienation to the race. But we are now those who have begun to receive the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness. That grace is what allows us to reign over life through the one, Jesus Christ. Those born only once and therefore related to Adam in natural birth are subject to the full weight of the Curse. Those born again with spiritual life, new life through Jesus Christ, stand free of Adam’s weight and are at liberty to make use of the grace of God. One birth means
death; a second birth means life. We who are related to Christ can learn to reign in life by the “much more” grace of God.

God’s grace is for victorious Christian living. We speak here of the gift of righteousness and the abundance of grace that comes with that gift. This gift of righteousness is that which allows us to stand accepted before a holy God. God is righteous. Man is unrighteous. The only means to approaching His presence is the gift of righteousness that God offers through Jesus Christ. As we find ourselves in Christ, we find ourselves likewise made acceptable to the Father. The gift of righteousness that lets us come into His family allows us to stand before Him in fellowship without fear. Recall Ephesians 2:8-9, “By grace you are saved through faith.”

So then, why are there not more victorious Christians in the family of God? Why are too many Christians living in defeat and without victory? Their lives still seem dominated by many of the influences that held them in bondage before they came to Christ. The reason is right here in Romans 5:17. They have neither appreciated nor appropriated the grace offered them. They have not thrown themselves upon the “much more” grace of God. Perhaps they know of the grace that forgives sins and admits one into the family of God. But they have not drawn on, lived by, or counted on the abundance of grace that grants believer to reign over life. They have eternal life. They have been born again. Yet there is no reigning in life! They are not victorious, Christlike overcomers. Because they lack knowledge of and trust in the abundance of grace God offers, they are made weak. It is those who receive the abundance of grace that are the ones who reign in powerfully in this life.

If we want to be victorious Christians, and God does call us to walk in victory, it is only by receiving the abundance of His grace that we shall be conquerors. Learning more and more how
to count on the richness of His grace, we come to depend upon it, and so, live by it. The abundance of grace lets us reign in life through the one, Jesus Christ. Death reigned over us before Christ came into our lives. But now life can reign through us in Christ as we keep receiving the abundance of His grace. And according to this Romans 5:17, this abundance of His grace is much more than able to do the necessary transforming work; it is surpassingly able to take us from the death reigning over us to abundant life in Christ Jesus.

Romans 5:20 says, “Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound.” We noted this early on in our study of the law. If the law cannot save you, then it cannot sanctify and mature you. The law serves to point out the abounding reality of the offenses of sin against God. “The law entered that the offense might abound.” The law of God is revealed to man that sin might be known as sin and sinful hearts might be flushed out in open rebellion. The law illuminates the guilt of man.

“But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more.” Again, we have the “much more” grace of God. However greatly sin had abounded in our lives, grace was able to abound much more. The word for “abound” utilized here is one used in the first century for waves rolling up on the seashore. How many times did waves of sin roll over our lives? No doubt, those waves have stacked up pretty high on the seashore of our lives. Fortunately, in Christ, the more waves of sin that rolled up before our salvation, the more grace abounded to us. If need be, a tidal wave of the forgiving grace of God swept over those sins. Where sin abounded, grace abounded much more. God’s grace is able to just keep rolling in, wave after wave. Comforting, cleansing, renewing, encouraging, strengthening, and liberating: the “much more” grace of God.
The more I look at the grace of God the more I marvel how much I overlooked it early on in the Christian life. The more I teach about the grace of God, the more I marvel how I missed the its significance in the early years that I taught the Word of God. One of my favorite topics in all of the Scripture is the subject of our last session of the series: the “much more” grace of God. It is much more than any of us ever thought. It is much more able than we ever imagined. And it is much more than we could ever need, tremendous though our needs might be.

57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

(1Cr 15:57-58)

Thanks be to God for many reasons. But in this case, the reason is that He gives us the victory. He gives grace for victorious Christian living. This is a victory verse—a victory chapter. And spiritual victory is God’s gift of grace to our lives through faith. The just shall live by faith (Rom 1:17). We walk by faith, not by sight.

How do we know we have victory over sin and death? The resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, proclaimed powerfully in 1 Corinthians 15 is our evidence. If we believe in the Lord Jesus, the risen, victorious Lord, we can thank God who gives us the victory. We have a resurrection-victory over sin and death. And it is more than enough grace for a steady, solid, overflowing effective ministry. “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.” We can be those brethren who are steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.
Our labor is not in vain in the Lord. Do not forget that our labor of our own strength is in vain.

“Apart from Me you can do nothing,” Jesus said. Our labor is not in vain in the Lord.

Thematic to our studies have been humility and faith. God gives grace to the humble. The just shall live by faith. We have access through faith into this grace in which we stand (Romans 5:2). Again this comes to the fore in our present session. Of our own natural resources, death reigns undiminished. Only through Christ can we reign in life, humbly admitting that on our own, death will reign over us. By faith given to us through Christ, we can reign in life as we draw on, receive, and rely upon His abundant grace.

Grace for Changing and Drawing Lives

The “much more” grace of God is the Lord’s grace for victorious Christian living. As well, the “much more” grace of God can be thought of and is spoken of in Scripture through two closely related terms. God’s grace changes lives and God’s grace draws lives. The grace of God is more than able to transform us and then knit others lives with us. The grace of God also draws other lives toward us that we might touch them and minister to them.

12And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry,

13although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. 14And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. (1Ti 1:12-14)
Here the apostle Paul is giving thanks to Jesus Christ who enabled him. Those are words that infer the grace of God at work. God enabled Paul; and so, God counted him faithful. The only way we can ever be faithful is by God enabling us to walk in a faithful path. God put Paul into the ministry and He puts us into service.

And note this—God used Paul although he was formerly a blasphemer. He lived his life in opposition to the character and the work of God. He was a persecutor. And he was an insolent man, a petulant man, a scornful, and a scoffing man. In short, he was a proud man. To the eyes of the culture around him, he was a Hebrew of the Hebrews. As far as rising in the ranks of a religious culture, he was at the top. And yet in God’s eyes, here is what he was: a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man. In Israel he was respected, having power, influence, and a host of responsibilities; yet how different is man’s perspective from God’s.

We might be tempted to see him as a man that could not be used of God. Paul even rejected God to the point of taking part in the murder of Stephen. He oversaw it. He held the cloaks and garments of those stoning this blessed, fruitful, Spirit-filled, servant of the Lord. But here is the amazing thing: God changed everything. And He can do the same for us.

So often we are tempted to disbelieve that God could use us because of the stain upon our souls. Yet this is fruit of the lies, the accusations, and the condemnations of the enemy. Never fall to these falsehoods. “And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant.” Exceedingly abundant, the strength of God’s grace, which produces faith and love in Christ Jesus, will never be taxed when cleansing us of our pasts.
When Paul had been humbled, knocked off his mount while riding to Damascus to take more Christians captive, he was humbled and threw himself on the grace of the Lord. And in that grace, he found faith and love, which are in Christ Jesus. And as he grew in faith and love, as he grew in dependence upon God, the grace of the Lord was proving exceedingly abundant. The “much more” grace of God, here called the exceedingly abundant grace of God— that is what turned the apostle Paul from a blasphemer, a persecutor, an insolent man, into a fruitful, faithful, humble, victorious servant of the living God. Bringing forth all of these resources that are in Christ Jesus, Paul’s life was transformed—as will be our own lives.

The only reason any of us are enabled to serve in the Lord’s name is the exceedingly abundant grace of God. It changes everything. Otherwise, we would be laboring under condemnation with death reigning over our lives. Instead, we have thrown ourselves on the mercy and grace of God. God draws us from a life of tragedy and futility into the life of a fruitful and abounding vessel in His hand. That is what the Scripture is talking about when we consider the “much more” grace of God.

Too many of us have thought the grace of God was equal to the forgiveness of God. No, the grace of God is far greater than simple synonym for the forgiveness of God. That does not diminish the forgiveness of God— which is of course majestic and priceless. It is just the first taste we get of the grace of God. And we are to receive of the abundance of that grace.

Paul received it so and look to the example of his life. Let us not live under letter of the law in self-striving. Let us not live under self-righteousness, lifting ourselves up and condemning others. Let us live as humble servants who throw ourselves, in faith, on the “much more” grace of God. It changes everything. It transforms death into life.
And by their prayer for you, who long for you because of the exceeding grace of God in you. (2Cr 9:14)

Paul is here speaking of one group of Christians praying for another. And he says the reason they long for you, the reason they yearn for you and express it through prayer, is because of the exceeding grace of God in you. As we allow the “much more” grace of God to work in our lives in an ever-increasing manner, other lives are drawn to us by that same grace that is working in us and on us. And this allows us to minister to them by that same grace of God that is changing our lives.

I have seen this dynamic here in 2 Corinthians 9:14 work in my own heart toward other people. I think now of some Christians in whom the “much more” grace of God has been greatly received. Knowing such makes me yearn for them. I think about them. I pray for them. I crave their company. Let us let God make us vessels of His grace that others might desire our company for the Christ we radiate.

The “much more” grace of God changes lives and draws lives. We let the grace of God work greatly in us, fill us up more and more, flow out to others, people will want to be with us, hang out with us, pray with us, and talk with us. You know what is going to happen? That grace touches their lives. That is another great picture of ministry. Willingness to become vessels of the “much more” grace of God so that people will yearn to get close is a wonderful thing for the “much more” grace is certain to spills out on them. What a great way to minister. Grace changes lives and draws lives to those with changed lives.
Warnings Concerning Grace

Now a couple of warnings concerning grace would be appropriate. By God’s grace He warns us about His grace because we do not want to wrongly relate to the grace of God.

Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. (Jud 1:3)

The Word of God is the content of truth called “the faith” in which we place our faith. The faith is that in which we place our faith. God has delivered this message of the faith into our lives; and now, we earnestly contend for it. “Once for all delivered to the saints.” Put your faith in it and earnestly contend for it. Stand up for it. Keep it pure. Keep it true. Live it out. Do not compromise it. Exhort, warn, and even admonish and rebuke and reprove, if necessary, those who want to compromise it and change its message. Earnestly contend for the faith.

We have been doing some of that in this study. In fact we have been doing it on a very critical issue. We have been earnestly contending—for the grace of God, to the glory of God. Do not live by the letter of the law. Do not put others under the letter of the law. The heart of the faith, the heart of the message of the Word of God, is the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Just as we find justification, salvation, and new birth right at the heart of the entire counsel of God, so to must we see that the grace of God is essential to the context of Scripture. We must never sacrifice God’s grace to the emphasis of the law. And it is for this that we have been
earnestly contending throughout these sessions. Jude 1:4 tells us, why we must earnestly contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints. “For certain men have crept in unnoticed.”

One of the reasons we must earnestly, with our true heart, stand up for the truth and the message of the Word of God, is that people creep into the family of God. They creep into the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. They creep into positions of ministry and they want to change things and deny things. These are men who were long ago marked out for this condemnation. They are ungodly men who have their own agenda or their own message. And look what they do. They “turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.”

We do not want to be those who turn the grace of our God into lewdness. We do not want to cooperate with, assist, endorse, and further those who want to turn the grace of our God into lewdness. God’s grace is there to forgive our stumblings into the most lewd of issues; but grace does not stand to validate lewdness as a way of life. God’s grace is there to forgive every failing; but it is not intended to presumptively create a walk that feeds the flesh and ignores the character of God. That is turning the grace of God into something tragic. The grace of God is here to make us more and more like Jesus Christ. That grace exists to produce a fruitful life, good works and obedience.

What you are doing is you are taking the word of grace and letting your flesh make provision for lusts thereof. It is a deceit of the enemy. It is a deed of the flesh. It is not of the Spirit. So we need that warning. Lord, help us. Do not let us turn the grace of our God into lewdness or into lasciviousness or into licentiousness. Romans 6 builds on this thought and warn us against licentious thinking.
1What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? 2Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? (Rom 6:1-2)

When the grace of God is beginning to be heard and is so astounding and liberating, perversion of the flesh wants to destroy it. And the natural thinking of man reason that if sin abounded and then grace abounded where sin abounded, why do we not just continue in sin so that we can provoke more grace? Paul deals with this horrifying thought: “How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?”

By the grace of God we died with Jesus Christ on the cross. And as disinterested as He is in sin, He wants us to more and more, by His grace, become disinterested in it. That is what the grace of God is for—not for licentiousness. We are gained no license to go out and violate the character of God. Rather than a license to sin, the grace of God is a means to godliness. May God use us to help others to properly understand His grace.

Those who wish to take the grace of God and use it as a cover for lewdness or an excuse for more indulgence throw themselves right back under the law of God. And at that point, they do not need to hear more about the grace of God that they have abused and twisted; instead, they need to hear more about the law of God that brings them to accountability. Remember, 1 Timothy 1:8-9, the law is for the rebellious. It is for the insubordinate. God does not want us living under the law; His grace is there to redeem us from the law and to enable us to live more and more up to His holy standards. But if we abuse, reject, twist, and mistreat the grace of God, we are walking according to the flesh. And the inference from Galatians 5:18 is that we have put ourselves back under the law, practically speaking. This reintroduction to life under the law is neither concerning
salvation nor concerning eternal life, but concerns our fellowship, our relationship, and our walk with the Lord. The law is for the rebellious.

1 We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain. 2 For He says: "In an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you." Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation. (2Cr 6:1-2)

Verse 1 reminds us that the children of God are workers together with the Lord. As workers together with Him, many have only thought about being workers together with each other for God. Actually we are workers together with Him. It is a wonderful thing to want to work for God. It is a more glorious thing, though, to learn to work with God. Learning to work for God shows devotion, zeal, and desire. But learning to work with God shows wisdom and insight into the need for the grace of God to make one an effective worker. Christ lives in us. He walks with us. We are workers together with Him. We are partners with God! And as the Father did great works through the Son, so now the Son wants to do great works through us. We want to learn to be workers together with God. That is where the power is. That is where the fruit comes from. That is where there is victorious ministry. That is where lives are effective.

And as workers together with God, God pleads with us through the Apostle not to receive the grace of God in vain, for the grace of God is critical in working together with Him. It is what God uses to make our lives useful and fruitful. We must not receive His grace in vain. We must not acknowledge it and then accept it for less than it is intended. This is strict warning not to ignore the grace of God in growth, service, and sanctification.
If you and I think the grace of God is only for forgiveness, in a sense, we are receiving it in vain. Not that we will not find forgiveness, but we are not receiving His grace for all the reasons it was intended. If we think God’s grace is only for justifying people and not for sanctifying people, we are still acknowledging it and it will work in our lives in those areas that we are counting on—but it is still partly in vain. We are lessening the grace by our limited belief in it. The grace of God is given not only to justify us, but to sanctify us as well. And if we receive the grace of God only to forgive us and cover our sin when we stumble as a Christian, but we do not receive that grace to transform us and make us less likely to stumble in the future, then we are receiving the grace of God partly in vain. We are workers together with God, so God pleads with us, “Do not receive My grace in vain.”

These warnings about grace are necessary to our studies for to the extent we misunderstand the grace of God, we are missing out on the “much more” grace of God. We are fallen into something else. We begin trying to make the things of God feed the desires of our flesh. We do not want to miss the “much more” grace of God. Do not change the grace of God. Do not abuse the grace of God. Do not receive it in vain. Do not acknowledge it, but fail to let it have its full-orbed work in our lives.

**The Dimensions of God’s Grace**

This brings us to a consideration of the dimensions of God’s grace. The more we see how large and great His grace is, the more we will want to be clear in our understanding and full in our appropriation of it. God’s grace is the “much more” grace of God. It is so much more than we have ever thought it could be. May God stimulate our thinking about His grace as we continue our study here. Let us realize that we have only begun to partake of the grace of God.
That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of
His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (Eph 2:7)

God has so much grace that He is called exceedingly rich in His grace. He raised us up in Christ
with this in mind: that in the ages to come God would show His people the exceeding riches of
His grace. He does this “in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” We who are in Christ are now the
objects of the kindness of God. And through that kindness exercised toward us, displayed toward
us, and shown to us, He is expressing the exceeding riches of His grace. From the day we are
saved through the ages on earth, the Lord wants to show His grace by being kind to you and me.

We often forget something simple: God is nice. He is very nice. He is nice beyond description. It
is right and proper for Him to thunder from Mount Sinai, “Thou shalt” and “Thou shalt not,” for
rebellious men needed to know how holy God was and how unholy we are; but as the book of
Hebrews tells us, we have not come to that mountain. We have come to Mount Zion, the New
Jerusalem. We have come not to relate through law but through grace. We have come not to hear
thunder and lightening, describing our ungodliness and His holiness. We have come broken,
finding forgiveness in the blood of the Lamb. Now we have come to one who is a shepherd, who
picks us up like a sheep. God is nice. He is kind. He is good!

The dimensions of His grace are exceedingly rich. The same God that we will live with forever is
the God we know even now. The exceeding riches of His grace are ours in this very moment.
May God build our appetite for His grace, our comprehension of His grace, our faith in His grace,
and our humble sense of need for that kind of grace. “Grace upon grace.” I love that phrase. Oh
Growing in the Grace of God - Bob Hoekstra

The “Much More” Grace of God

Lord, just lavish it upon us. For Your glory. For Your name’s sake. For the changing of our lives. For the touching of other lives. For the building of Your church. That is the end of grace.

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. (Eph 3:8)

God gave grace to the apostle Paul and then sent him out to preach the grace of Jesus Christ. And here Paul calls that grace “the unsearchable riches of Christ.” Some translations rightly translate this as “the unfathomable riches of Christ.” This ocean of grace is unfathomable. You cannot measure it. You cannot divine the fathoms down to its bottom—for there is no bottom. There is no end to them because they flow out of the infinite heart of our infinite Lord God. The dimensions of His grace are exceedingly rich, are unsearchable, and are truly unfathomable.

As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. (1Pe 4:10)

“The manifold grace of God” speaks of the dimensions of God’s grace. God’s grace is manifold, many-faceted. After you have seen one aspect of it and then another and then another and then another and then another, you wonder how much more there can be. You must wonder at how many different ways God’s grace can be seen and known and understood and walked in.

Like a diamond, God’s grace shines forth a new facet with every new perspective one takes, and so, further reveals a new and great, reflected beauty. But that is a meager comparison. It does not take one forever to see every facet on a diamond—even a very impressive diamond. But the
many-faceted aspects of the grace of God, the manifold grace of God just goes on and on: Grace for forgiveness; grace to grow up; grace for service; grace for fruit; grace for obedience; grace for victory; grace for wisdom and insight; grace in relating to people; grace for ministering to the family; grace on the job; grace at church; grace applied to new problems we never ran into before. This is the manifold grace of God.

**To Conclude**

We are called to be good stewards of the grace of God. As each one has received the gift, that is the gifts of service by God’s grace, let us serve it out to one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

If you have been a Christian very long, you are probably aware of Christian stewardship. I do not know how many years I was growing in appreciation of being a steward and never realized that we have a stewardship of the grace of God. A steward is one who is accountable to use the resources of the master for the will of the master and for the glory of the master and for the work of the master. Our Lord God is a God of grace. We are stewards of the manifold grace of God. We are not just stewards of our resources, stewards of our time, or stewards of our gifts. We are stewards of all the grace of God.

In many ways you could say, one of the highest stewardships to which we are called is stewardship of the grace of God. We are accountable to God to use His grace for His glory, for His will, and for His work. And as we plunge into the grace of God, our focus is not the gifts that we can receive for our work in His grace. We are accountable to keep well and utilize well the manifold grace of God. We are accountable to walk in it. We are accountable to receive it and
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The “Much More” Grace of God

draw on it. We are accountable to contend for it. We are accountable to serve it out to others. We are answerable to God for its use or abuse.

Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Heb 4:16)

Everywhere I turn it seems like there is a time of need there. What are we to do with that? There is a throne that rules the universe and it is characterized here as the throne of grace. By the grace of God we may come boldly to that throne. We come not irreverently. We come not self-righteously, flippantly, or casually with God. But nonetheless, we come boldly. We come humbly. We come worshipfully. We come bowing down in the heart. But we come boldly as well. This is our Father sitting on that throne. Here we can obtain mercy— we do not seek that which we deserve, but we find grace.

At last, 2 Peter 3:18 says, “But grow in the grace and the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.” By the grace of God, may we have a yearning and a passion to keep growing in the grace of God. And through the knowledge of that grace and the work of that grace, may we get to know our God better and better. And may we, in knowing better that grace, become better and better stewards of the manifold grace of God.
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Closing Prayer

Father, we give You glory for Your great grace. We magnify Your name. You are a gracious God, abounding and exceedingly rich in grace. Thank You for Your saving grace, for Your justifying grace. Teach us more and more about Y our sanctifying grace and serving grace. Grace for victory. Grace for being changed and for touching lives. Guard and protect us from abusing, misunderstanding, under using, or misusing the grace of God. Make us good stewards of it, Lord. May it bring honor to Your name, life to Your church, and salvation to the lost. We pray in Jesus’ name. A men.
Growing in the Grace of God

Appendix A

By
Bob Hoekstra

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Blue Letter Bible
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The Law of God

(Study #1 of 6)

Introduction:

Romans 6:14
Galatians 4:21

Its Message:

Leviticus 19:1-4
1 Peter 1:15, 16
Matthew 5:48

Its Inability:

Hebrews 7:18, 19
Galatians 2:16; 3:2, 3

Its Ability:

Genesis-Deuteronomy; Matthew 5-7
Romans 3:19, 20
Galatians 3:24
1 Timothy 1:8-10
Galatians 5:18

Its Fulfillment:

Matthew 5:17
Romans 3:21-24; 8:4

Conclusion:
The Grace of God

(Study #2 of 6)

Introduction:

Romans 6:14

Hebrews 7:18, 19

Grace, Not Law:

John 1:17, 16

Galatians 2:21

God’s Justifying Grace:

Romans 3:24

Ephesians 1:7

God’s Sanctifying Grace:

Titus 2:11, 12

2 Peter 3:18

Acts 20:32

Hebrews 13:9

2 Timothy 2:1

Living by Grace:

James 4:6

Romans 5:2

Romans 1:17

Conclusion:
Living Daily by the Grace of God

(Study #3 of 6)

Introduction:

James 4:6
Romans 5:2

Bearing Fruit:

Colossians 1:6
Romans 7:4 (not law)
John 15:4, 5

Good Works:

John 6:28, 29
Acts 4:33; 14:26
Ephesians 2:10
2 Corinthians 9:8
1 Corinthians 15:10
Colossians 1:29

Obedience:

Philippians 2:12b, 13
Hebrews 13:20, 21
2 Thessalonians 2:16, 17

Conclusion:

Ephesians 3:20, 21
The Holy Spirit and the Grace of God

(Study #4 of 6)

Introduction:

Zechariah 4:6, 7
Luke 22:20
2 Corinthians 3:5, 6

Given Life by the Spirit:

John 3:5, 6; 6:53c, 63a

Walking According to the Spirit:

Galatians 5:16, 18, 22, 25
Romans 8:5, 6, 14

Being Filled with the Spirit:

Ephesians 5:18
Luke 11:13
Ephesians 3:16-19
John 7:37-39

Conclusion:

Acts 7:51
Ephesians 4:30
1 Thessalonians 5:19
Grace for Knowing God

(Study #5 of 6)

Introduction:

Ephesians 2:13

Getting to Know God:

2 Peter 3:18
John 17:3
Philippians 3:8, 10
Ephesians 1:17

In Christ:

Galatians 6:15
Ephesians 1:3

Christ in Us:

Colossians 1:27
Galatians 2:20

Conclusion:

John 14:10
John 6:57
2 Peter 1:2, 3
The “Much More” Grace of God

(Study #6 of 6)

Introduction:

2 Peter 1:2

Grace for Victorious Christian Living:

Romans 5:17, 20
1 Corinthians 15:57, 58

Grace Changing and Drawing Lives:

1 Timothy 1:12-14
2 Corinthians 9:14

Warnings Concerning Grace:

Jude 4
Romans 6:1, 2
2 Corinthians 6:1, 2

Dimensions of God’s Grace:

Ephesians 2:7; 3:8

Conclusion:

1 Peter 4:10
Hebrews 4:16
2 Peter 3:18