

Front Cover

WHAT EVERY "NEW" CHRISTIAN SHOULD KNOW

New Christians are often overwhelmed by the perfect standard of life and conduct taught in the New Testament. "Be ye therefore perfect ..." (Matthew 5:48). Some men are even deterred from obedience by the fear that they cannot live the Christian life. Many in the religious world expect the Christian to be "sinless," and, like the Pharisees of Jesus' day, become the watchdogs and judges of the church. Matthew 23:28: "Even so ye outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity." The other extreme seeks license for sin in the realization that perfection is not humanly possible. "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer therein" (Romans 6:1-2)? Both of these extremes fail to present the image of the Christian presented in the New Testament.

Our response to God is based in our love for him and our desire to please him. Jesus said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). He expects us to do what we can. "She hath done what she could" (Mark 14:8). We are not given a list of good works by which we would still be unworthy servants. "So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, 'We are unprofitable servants.'" (Luke 17:10).

Our hope is in grace while we strive to live in the shadow and footsteps of the Savior. "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow in his steps" (I Peter 2:2). We cannot disregard the written word and claim immunity in grace. God cares about the **direction** of our lives and he provides the **perfection**. "But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (I John 1:7). In this study we will look at several New Testament words and concepts that will help each of us walk in the footprints of the one who set for us the perfect example. "...grace and truth came

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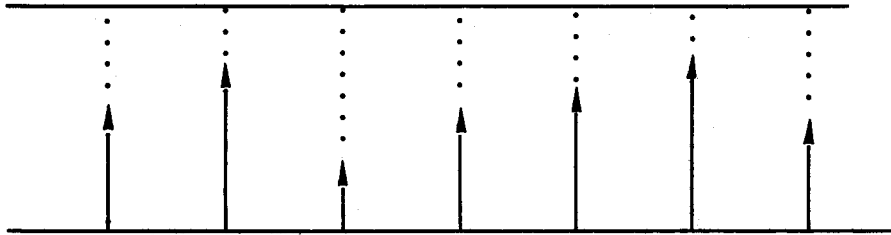
by Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). Our obedient faith allows us to be viewed in God's grace as righteous. "By whom we have received grace...for obedience to the faith..." (Romans 1:5).

GRACE

This word is used 156 times in the New Testament and in several different ways. Sometimes, it is used as a greeting (Ephesians 1:2). Originally, this greeting was only used in the morning to express the joy and anticipation of a new day. The word also is used to describe *Pleasantness* and *Attractiveness* (Colossians 4:6) or *Favor* and *Approval* (Luke 2:40). Several times it is used as an expression of "thanks or appreciation for a favor" (Romans 6:17). Most often the word describes

the sublime concept of God's grace into which we are thrust by our obedience to the gospel and wherein we live as we strive day by day to walk in the light. God's demand for *perfection* has never changed. However, even in our unworthy imperfect state, those who are in Christ are in grace and Jesus pays the overdraft for the imperfection of our efforts to live like Him. "By whom (Christ) also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in the hope of the glory of God" (Romans 5:2). We learned about faith and salvation by our study of the word of God. "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). Grace is found in Christ "...be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (II Timothy 2:1). We get into Christ when we, in response to His will, are baptized. "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Galatians 3:27).

This line represents the perfection of God's standard and plan for Christians



The Christian seeks to serve God but falls short
Grace fills the gap

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Each man struggles with his knowledge of the Word and circumstances within his life. No man is perfect. "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Each man must rely on grace and mercy to obtain salvation. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:8).

Does this mean that I can live and do as I please without regard for the word of God and that I do not have to do good works of the Christian life? "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). Not at all! The works that will not save us are called works of righteousness. "...not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he has saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5).

We cannot work our way to heaven, but the spirit of the servant is one that seeks to serve God and fellow man. Men are to help each other grow in grace and knowledge with a gentle spirit and love. "...ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness..." (Galatians 6:1). Grace is not a license to live in sin or to engage in sinful conduct. Grace is abundant (II Corinthians 4:15) as we walk in the light, and the blood of Jesus Christ continues to wipe away our sins.

Grace works like a shower. As long as we stand in the shower, the filth of our imperfections are washed away. If we choose no longer to stand in the shower, but to walk away and live in sin apart from the truth, grace no longer reaches us. "...grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1:17).

Thus, it does not give us permission to live a sinful life without consequences. Galatians 5:4 teaches that we can fall from grace. "...ye are fallen from grace." If we turn our back on God, we forfeit grace and face the condemnation of His wrath. "And do not fear those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28). Grace motivates us, and permits us to live lives that are right with God. "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (II Corinthians 5:21).

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JUSTIFICATION

The words *just*, *justify*, and *justification* are used over 140 times in the New Testament. The root word describes a divine act (Philippians 3:9) by which God looks at an obedient child and, in spite of his imperfections and that he is deserving of death (Romans 6:23), judges him as right in the sight of the Maker. The word is a legal term that pronounces a man upright in conforming to the laws of God and man. He is vindicated, set free, acquitted, made pure and not subject to suffering the vengeance of eternal fire (Jude 7). The New Testament teachings on justification are closely connected to grace. Paul said, "That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:7). We are also justified by faith. "Wherefore the law [of Moses] was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith" (Galatians 3:24). Our state of being justified in the sight of God is a result of living by faith (Galatians 3:11).

Justification is also a free gift of God that came because of the righteousness of Christ (Romans 5:18). It was God's eternal purpose to justify the heathen through faith (Galatians 3:8). Justification comes to the Christian by his contact with the blood of Christ (Romans 5:9). Man is not justified by the works of the Law of Moses (Galatians 2:16). However, the good works of the Christian life balance and activate man's faith (James 2:24).

Paul reminds us in Galatians 3:1-7, that this justification came by the hearing of faith, obeying the truth, and not being bewitched to revert from the Gospel. When the sinner is washed from his sins, he is, "...justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of God" (I Corinthians 6:11). What an incredible gift God bestows upon us. Because we live in Christ He accepts that sacrifice for our sins and pardons us. We are made heirs of God according to the hope of eternal life (Titus 3:7).

SANCTIFICATION

The news for the Christian gets better. Our baptism not only gave us grace and justification but we also were sanctified. "...but ye are sanctified, but you are justified..." (I Corinthians

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6:11). The word of *grace* is able to build us up and give us an inheritance among all of them which are sanctified (Acts 20:32). We are sanctified in Christ Jesus (I Corinthians 1:2); sanctified by obedience (I Peter 1:2); sanctified with the washing of water by the word (Ephesians 5:26); sanctified through this truth by faith (John 17:19, Acts 26:18); sanctified with the blood of Jesus (Hebrews 13:12); sanctified by the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:16); and sanctified by God the Father (Jude 1).

The word *sanctify* in various forms is used 29 times in the New Testament, but the root word, *holy*, from which it comes is used 229 times. Sanctification can only be accomplished by God who is holy or *separate from sin*. The word is used to describe God's action in setting us apart for His own service, or including us in the inner circle of what is holy. God chooses to see us and treat us as purified and separated from sin because we have chosen to accept His grace and justification. When we are sanctified we are preserved in Jesus Christ (Jude 1), and perfected (Hebrews 10:14). Since we are set apart for the service of God, we have responsibilities. We must keep ourselves suitable for the Master's use and be prepared for every good work (II Timothy 2:21). It is the will of God that we abstain from immorality (I Thessalonians 4:3), and that we be ready always to give an answer to every man that asks us concerning the hope that is in us, and we must do it in meekness and fear (I Peter 3:15).

LIFTING THE YOKE OF BONDAGE

Jesus came to provide an abundant life (John 10:10). He set us free from the yoke of bondage (John 8:32). He offers this invitation: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30). What a promise! Learn of me, he says, and I will lighten your load and give you rest and a yoke that is easy. The way that leads to God is narrow and demands a life dedicated to the task, but we are not alone. We bask in grace, justification, and sanctification. The rewards are joy and hope and purpose and happiness. We must beware of those who, like the Pharisees of Jesus' day, would bind us with heavy burdens

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and make our life in Christ a misery rather than a joy; those who would look at life through the eyes of a vulture and feel that is their duty to seek out, criticize, judge, and correct every flaw in human character. Some day the Father of us all

will call into account those who, with pretended zeal, have taken the delicate bud of a fragile soul in the cycle of its struggle to bloom in the sunshine of God's love and snuffed it out in careless abandon.

Paul encourages "stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again in the yoke of bondage" (Galatians 5:1). The denial of grace, justification, and sanctification has led many to search for human perfection in the realm of spiritual service. The path to destruction has often been started with promotional rather than transformational preaching and teaching.

Promotional teaching says "you ought to." "You can never do enough to please God." Catch phrases are "could have, should have, and would have." We have people lamely reply, "I know I don't do like I ought, but..." At this point many will seek rebaptism to calm feelings of spiritual panic. Having become slaves to the tyranny of *the ought*, we will move on down the road to self-deprecation. This will trigger low self-esteem and shame. Shame convinces me that I am bad and without redeeming qualities!

The next step is anxiety. This will produce feelings of guilt, condemnation, and criticism. By this time we are back under the yoke of bondage with a full blown legalistic concept of the church. We make up our own lists of do's and don'ts that vary with location and culture. The next move is to anger. Somewhere something went wrong and we are not enjoying our relationship with Christ or His church. We feel anger and resentment since we cannot control others who are not doing like they "ought to do." We are unhappy and hostile.

The final step is denial. We will either break down or break away and be lost to the service of the King. The preventative to this often repeated destructive process is transformational teaching. This approach says, "you can, by his grace, accomplish what God wants you to do; and this is how." We can adopt the words of the apostle Paul, "but by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon

me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly that they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (I Corinthians 15:10).

GUARD AGAINST BEING LIKE A PHARISEE

The strongest language of Jesus ministry was leveled at the religious leaders who insisted on binding not only the law, but also the traditions of men, until it became a burden that neither they nor their fathers could bear (Acts 15:10). Always in your study compare the attitude of Jesus with that of the Pharisees and then follow the way of Jesus and the Cross.

<u>Pharisees</u>	<u>Jesus and the Cross</u>
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Kill the sinner John 8:5	Go and sin no more John 8:11
Looking good, pretense Matthew 6:5; 23:25	Doing good Acts 10:38
Perfect not good enough Matthew 23:4; Luke 11:46	Grace–security–doing best I John 1:7
Unforgiving, hostile Luke 11:52	Forgiving–compassion Mark 6:34; Luke 15:20
Unmerciful Matthew 23:23	Full of mercy James 3:17
More than the law Acts 15:10	Spirit of Christ and truth Romans 8:9; John 8:32
Super judgmental, play God Luke 11:42	Show love Luke 6:27,32; John 13:35; Galatians 6:2

The list is endless. We need to center our lives in Christ and in our task of sharing the Good News with all who are still wandering in the desert of sorrow and sin. The message of

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Jesus is not a demand for sinless perfection without margin for error in your life, but rather a challenge to “do what you can” (Mark 14:3–9). Be like Jesus in going about doing good. Study to understand the will of God, pray for strength, and lift the burden of another human being each day. Love truth, righteousness, and lost souls. Remember, above all, that His grace reaches me!

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