

# Grace Alive



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L O R E M I P S U M

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## from the Author

The epistles of the Bible reveal the gospel of God's grace which was sweeping Asia in the first century AD, gaining converts in city after city from among both the Jews and the Gentiles. The Christian Church was alive and growing, a vibrant testimony to Jesus Christ and His salvation. However false teachers had crept into the churches and were corrupting the good news, creating confusion and misunderstanding among the believers. These false brethren were mostly from among the Judaizers who asserted that the Christians had to follow the Law of Moses, including the circumcision ritual, in order to be saved. The apostle Paul had to deal strongly with these deceivers, even going so far as to curse them for leading Christians astray. Today a corrupt version of the gospel of Jesus Christ is still being taught in many western churches, with the result that the Church is weak and ineffectual because believers are unaware of their full heritage in Christ. Our world today needs the Church's life-changing message more than ever - the uncorrupted version of the gospel of grace in Christ Jesus. No other gospel has the blessing and anointing of God upon it for it is only His grace that can give the victory to overcome the world, sin, and the devil. GRACE ALIVE is a short summation of the grace gospel taught by the apostle Paul. It is the hope of this author that this book will serve as a key to unlock the powerful, enduring impact of the grace we can all have in Christ Jesus.

Lorri Frandsen

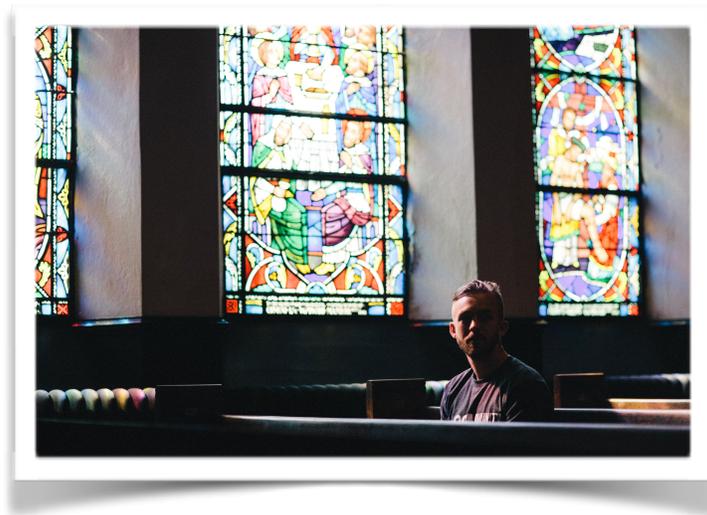
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# *A Corrupt Gospel*

## Chapter 1



The picture above shows a lone man sitting in a church pew, looking somewhat bemused. The beautiful stained glass windows suggest that he may be in a cathedral, probably one with hundreds of years of history behind it. It could be a liturgical church steeped in ecclesiastical tradition. Such cathedrals often have stunning architecture that is nothing short of glorious. Builders of such works of art poured incredible energy and resources into making these churches showcases of God's magnificence. At one time such a church would have been packed with parishioners but in this picture we see a lone figure sitting by himself. It's just a picture, but its used here to represent the Church of today, which according to recent polls and statistics, is in trouble. It's in trouble because Christian congregations are dwindling and countless houses of worship have had to close down. Some have been put up for sale; others have been converted into mosques, private homes, or secular buildings. This has been happening in Europe for some time, but now it's happening in America as well. Some experts say that at the present rate of decline, by the year 2050, the percentage of the American population attending church will be almost half of what it was in 1990! This, in spite of programs designed to 'grow the Church' such as community barbecues, ladies' luncheons, music concerts...even circuses!!! Yet the numbers continue to wane.

Whatever growth does occur is often 'transfer growth' (where members from congregations switch churches), rather than conversion growth. Even fervent believers are becoming irregular in their church attendance. The reason this is so troubling is because the Church is the moral anchor of society, reflecting the spiritual climate of the land. Therefore a dwindling Church in the West is an ominous sign of dark times for our culture and for our world at large. Christians are to be the salt of the earth, spreading truth and influencing mankind to forsake sinful ways. This brings blessings of peace and prosperity wherever the public response is positive. But, as Jesus remarked in Matthew 5:13: "*...if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.*"

The lifestyle of a professing Christian today is often no different from that of a non-Christian, having no preservative effect on society whatever. Perhaps Christian preachers have to take some responsibility for this, as so many no longer address real issues in the church such as divorce, chastity, and cohabitation. Many are more concerned about being 'successful' than addressing relevant topics, choosing to emulate the mega churches with their focus on fads, creative marketing strategies, image presentation, and membership drives—anything to make their churches popular with the community. None of these methods have done much in the way of sanctifying believers. The divorce rate among Christians is exactly the same as non-Christians (around 50 percent) and among professed Christians the statistics for premarital sex, abortion, and pornography are the same as well. Some blame our evolving culture for the effacement of Christianity in the West, citing the Internet and other media as tempting believers to tailor their spiritual lives to their own preferences. Turning on the television to listen to a televangelist within the comfort of one's own home is easier than traveling across town to sit in a church building for an hour or two. But convenience is only a small factor contributing to the slump in church attendance. A general complaint among Christians is that the Church has become boring and irrelevant. This is perplexing since the gospel of the early Church set peoples' hearts on fire and it spread like a raging inferno across the map of the ancient world. Could it be that the gospel of the Church today is not the same one preached by the early Christians? Could our own gospel have been corrupted in some way? A corrupt gospel is nothing new, and indeed many false teachings have been spawned throughout Biblical history.

But there is one corruption of the gospel that has been especially influential on the Church and has formed many of its creeds and doctrines for millennia. It's called the 'Galatian gospel' and the apostle Paul forcefully repudiated this insidious teaching in a letter written around 49 A.D. In the letter he wrote a scathing denunciation of a gospel he said was really 'no gospel at all', accusing it of weakening the Christians and robbing them of the freedom and joy they were meant to experience through their faith in Jesus Christ. In blunt, strong language, he rebuked the Galatian church for giving credence to it.

*I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the One who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God's curse!" (Galatians 1:6-9)*

Paul's words are as appropriate for today's Church as they were for the Galatians because that same message is still currently being taught in countless Western churches. Many Christians have accepted this 'gospel' and built their doctrinal understanding of the Scriptures around it. This so-called gospel may even be one of the main factors behind the declining numbers within the Christian Church today.



The Galatians were a Celtic people who dwelt mainly in the regions of Asia Minor in what was known as Galatia, in today's Turkey. These Celtic warriors were respected by Greeks and Romans and were often hired as mercenary soldiers, sometimes fighting on both sides in a battle.

In 64 BC, Galatia became a client-state of the Roman empire and in the 1st century AD, many of them were Christianized by the apostle Paul's missionary action.

One of the Epistles of Paul, which was likely the first New Testament book to be written, is addressed to the Galatian Christian communities. The Galatian churches had both Jewish and Gentile converts and Paul wrote to them to strengthen their faith, especially in the area of justification by faith alone, apart from the works of the Law of Moses.

However there were Judaizers in Galatia who were undermining the truth of the gospel by insisting that Christians had to keep the Mosaic Law, including circumcision, as a requirement for salvation. These Judaizers lived according to Jewish customs and rituals and they often tried to influence the Christian churches. Paul had many problems with them. Some even followed him from place to place, trying to undermine his ministry and confuse his converts.

At a Christian Council (in Acts 15), a group of Judaizers who were Pharisees, insisted that Gentiles could not be saved unless they obeyed the Law of Moses. Paul argued with them and was so convincing that he won the approbation of all the Council members. In his epistle to the Galatians he used the same argument used at the Council, emphasizing the Christian's liberty in Christ and denouncing the perversion of the gospel by the Judaizers. Not that this put an end to the conflict. The Judaizers continued their harassment to the point where the apostle Paul had to become aggressively defiant and forceful. He was so forthright that some might think he hated the Jews, but this was not so, for he was one himself. He belonged to the Pharisees who were religious purists committed to preserving and obeying the Law, and encouraging others to do so too.

*If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee... (Philippians 3:4-6)*

He actually had a high respect for the Jewish heritage, once stating that the Gentiles had much to be thankful for concerning the Jews.

*What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision? Much in every way! First of all, the Jews have been entrusted with the very words of God.... Theirs is the adoption to sonship; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised! (Romans 1:3; 9:4,5)*

Before becoming a Christian himself, Paul had been so zealous in his religion that he developed an intense hatred for Christians because they taught things contrary to the Jewish religion. He even made it his goal to capture, and then bring Christians to public trial and execution.

His attitude was not unusual among the Jews who were justifiably proud of their history and heritage and opposed any beliefs that ran counter to them. They were particularly proud of the fact that they had been entrusted with the Law of Moses (365 negative commands and 248 positive for a total of 613 commands) which covered every area of the life of Israel. They greatly revered Moses as a leader and prophet because he had received the 10 Commandments, written on stone, directly from God Himself when he was up on Mt. Sinai.

While He had been up there with God, the Israelites had been down at the foot of the mountain anxiously waiting to hear what God would say. When Moses brought down the 10 Commandments, the people had responded immediately.

*"We will do everything," the people answered. (Exodus 24: 3, 7)*

Their response indicated their confidence in the flesh to carry out whatever standards God required of them. This self-confidence formed what was to be the Jewish mindset for many centuries, a mindset that viewed the Law of Moses as the sign of God's partiality, giving the Jews a unique identity as a special, privileged people, superior to all other nations.

The Law in the Old Testament was called the torah, meaning "instruction." It was first written down on Mt. Sinai as an expression of God's moral standards. God gave the Law in order to keep Israel holy and separate from the licentiousness practiced by all the other nations. It was also meant to show the Jew his sin and then guide him to the Ceremonial Law which included a sacrificial system, a Temple, and a tribe of priests. Israel's priests were Levites and only they could make sacrifices for the people. One sacrifice stood out above all the others and was particularly important. On the Day of Atonement, Israel's high priest served at the temple, offering lamb's blood as an offering for sin, which was sprinkled on the cover of the ark of the covenant. The animal blood covered over the sins of the people so that God would not judge them. It was a temporary measure that did not actually do away with sin, but it bought the Israelites some time. God promised that one day He would send a Sacrifice that would actually save them from sin. But until that time the High Priest served in the Temple to offer a lamb sacrifice each year on the Day of Atonement. This ritual went on for thousands of years. Paul had been brought up in Jewish tradition and religion and he was well versed in all its doctrines. He had been advancing in Judaism beyond many of his own age, being extremely zealous for the traditions of his forefathers until he had a head-on encounter with Jesus Christ Himself. After that experience, all that went before became completely useless to him. His illustrious ancestral lineage meant little in comparison to what he had found in the Lord. From then on his passion was to preach Christ's gospel wherever he went, whereas before he had persecuted the Christian Church throughout Asia. One of the places he preached in was Galatia and the people had received his gospel eagerly. They had initially accepted his message in all its purity, but now he found that his work was being undone by false teachers. The Galatian believers were now adding works of the Law to the Christian faith, a damnable hybrid that resulted in death rather than life.

Paul targeted the Judaizers as the troublemakers, exposing their motives and denouncing them as '*people zealous to win you over, but for no good. What they want is to alienate you from us, so that you may have zeal for them. (Galatians 4:17)*' He reminded the Galatian believers that Christ had set them free, but if they let themselves be circumcised, Christ would have no value to them at all. They would be putting themselves under obligation to obey the whole law, and this would alienate them from Christ. In fact Paul put it even more strongly than that. He said they would have fallen away from grace. Then he turned on the Judaizers once more, referring to them as 'leaven' or yeast - a symbol for sin in the Jewish religion. In scathing and unflattering language, Paul warned that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough, meaning that the sinful influence of these false teachers could affect the whole church. Paul ended by angrily exclaiming that he wished the agitators would go the whole way and emasculate themselves! This was meant to be a parody of words regarding the Judaizers' obsession with circumcision which they were pushing on the Christians.

But circumcision wasn't the only thing they advocated for the Christian life. They also maintained that a Christian could only be sanctified (made holy) through obeying the Law. In other words, the Judaizers taught that a Christian had to first be circumcised in order to become a Christian, and then afterwards he would need to strive to keep the Law of commandments in order to keep that salvation. This doctrine has never really disappeared. In fact it is alive and well in many churches today. The Roman Catholic Church, for instance, teaches that baptism and confession are two rituals necessary for salvation.

Afterwards there is a 'second sanctification' which is a lifelong process in which a person already in the state of grace (saved through baptism) grows in holiness by faithfully carrying out works of merit. His failure to acquire sufficient merit results in him going to purgatory (a place of temporal punishment) after death, where he must complete the sanctification process. Many Protestant churches would disagree that anyone is saved by works or religious ritual, insisting that only faith in Christ is required for salvation. However they would agree with the Catholics that the Christian is required to keep the Law in order to be sanctified (made holy). Some Protestant denominations teach that failure to become holy through keeping the Law can result in ultimate loss of salvation. This is not unlike the corrupted gospel Paul was refuting in his letter to the church in Galatia. Here are some of his own words:

*Those who want to impress people by means of the flesh are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ.*

*Not even those who are circumcised keep the law, yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your circumcision in the flesh. May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation.... I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh? Have you experienced so much in vain—if it really was in vain? So again I ask, does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you by the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard? ...For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law." Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God, because "the righteous will live by faith." The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, it says, "The person who does these things will live by them." Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole." (Galatians 3:2-5; 10-13)*



# *Impossible Struggle*

## Chapter 2



Paul saw the light (figuratively as well as literally - Jesus appeared to him in a blinding light) but the Jews were loathe to give up their religion with its laws, traditions and ceremonies, even though not one Jew had ever been able to keep the Law perfectly. Jewish history is replete with instances of their countless failures. Although God had always been faithful to them, delivering them from slavery in Egypt, guiding them as a pillar of cloud by day and fire by night, splitting a rock to provide water, and making food fall from the sky, the Jews were unable to remain loyal to God in return. Time and again they turned away from God and took up the idols of neighboring pagan nations. Psalm 78 states:

*"They rebelled against the high God, they did not follow orders, they were like their ancestors - treacherous and disloyal and they angered God with their idols... God was angry; He completely rejected Israel. "*

Even the Levitical line of priests transgressed against God.

*"And now, you priests, this warning is for you. You do not hear, you do not resolve to honor my name, and God Almighty says, "I will send a curse upon you. Yes, I have cursed them already." (Malachi 2: 1-2)*

Admittedly, remaining true to God was not easy, even for those who wanted to be obedient to Him. Paul, the apostle, gave a perfect example of his own impossible struggle to obey the Commandments while he was under the Law. He stated that the Law had served him well as far as making him aware of sin. If it hadn't been for the command 'You shall not covet' he would never have known that coveting was wrong. However after learning the Law's prohibition against coveting, he found that the sin of covetousness increased to the point where he experienced every kind of coveting imaginable. It killed him spiritually. Prior to his awareness of this law, he had felt no guilt or condemnation but now he felt like a wretched slave to sin. He didn't know what to do about it. It seemed as though it wasn't even him doing the sinning but rather a sin principle operating through his body. He realized he had a sinful nature that prevented him from going the right way.

*So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?—, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in my sinful nature a slave to the law of sin. (Romans 7:21-25)*

Many years later, there was a man named Martin Luther from Germany who belonged to the Roman Catholic Church. He thought of becoming a lawyer but his fears of hell and God's wrath caused him to join a monastery in order to find salvation. However he soon became very disillusioned and discouraged by the immorality and corruption among the Catholic priests. Meanwhile he was constantly plagued by guilt, to the point where he practiced self-flagellation with a whip until he bled. Once he did penance by laying on the ground in the snow on a winter's night until he almost froze to death. Then one day, while preparing lectures, Luther read the first line of Psalm 22, where the Messiah cries out for mercy on the cross. It resonated with Luther who often felt a similar desperation in his own relationship with God. Two years later, while studying Paul's Epistle to the Romans, he read, "*The just will live by faith.*" He thought about this verse for a time until one day he realized the key to spiritual salvation was not enslavement to the Law but rather to believe that faith alone would bring salvation. He realized that up to that time, he had been influenced by a false gospel that had hidden the truth from him.



Others have been deceived by such a gospel as well. Mother Teresa once confessed: "People often say that God loves me, but I feel cold and empty inside. Where is the love, faith, trust, and prayer? Maybe I should not be with the Sacred Heart." Mother Teresa helped people for forty years, but she had a hard time finding meaning in life and she did not feel as close to God as she wanted.

Her Catholic training had kept her enslaved to a gospel that offered no peace or freedom. The apostle Paul, Martin Luther, and Mother Teresa all struggled in their faith. As they tried to get closer to God, they felt a sense of failure. They asked themselves, "How much is enough? When does it end? Why is God still not satisfied?" They were not happy in their Christianity, just as many Christians today are depressed and unhappy as they struggle in their walk with God. In many cases this is because the gospel they heard was a corrupt distortion of the true message of salvation.

But why all this sin consciousness in the first place? Why do people feel such a separation from God that they feel discouraged, even to the point of self-hatred? Why do they beat themselves up, like Martin Luther did? Why do they feel like they can never do enough for God, like Mother Theresa? The answer goes back to the very beginning of time when God created the garden of Eden and put man and woman in it. We all know the story. Adam and Eve ate from the forbidden tree of knowledge of good and evil, and that was the first sin. From then on there was a rift between God and humanity. This separation continued on through millennia with sin being passed on to successive generations. Even though the descendants of Adam did not sin in the exact same way as Adam, they were born in Adam's image and all inherited his sinful disposition. What's worse, all of humanity died spiritually because of that one sin. We were all made sinners from the sin of Adam.

The Scriptures put it this way:

*...people have no excuse for what they do.. Ever since the world was created it has been possible to see the qualities of God that are not seen..... They knew God but they didn't honor him as God. They didn't thank him. Their thinking became worthless. Their foolish hearts became dark. They claimed to be wise, but they made fools of themselves. They would rather have statues of gods than the glorious God who lives forever. ... So God let them go. He allowed them to do what their sinful hearts wanted to. ...They are full of every kind of sin, evil and ungodliness.*

*They want more than they need. They commit murder. They want what belongs to other people. They fight and cheat..... They hate God. .. They can't be trusted. They are not loving and kind. They know that God's commands are right and that those who do evil things should die. But they continue to do those very things...Everyone is under the power of sin. "No one is right with God, no one at all....They have all become worthless. No one does anything good, no one at all."...They do not know how to live in peace."... "They don't have any respect for God." (Romans 1:20-32)*

In spite of this damning description of fallen humanity, God loved his human creation and He made an agreement, called a covenant, that made a way for Him to reunite with His people. The first covenant He made was the Abrahamic Covenant (a faith covenant; the Old Law Covenant came later) and it was in effect for thousands of years. This covenant was based on faith and loyalty to God for without faith it is impossible to please God. Many of the Old Testament believers entered into this faith covenant with God. Abel had faith when he brought God a better offering than Cain. Enoch had faith and was taken from the earth without dying. Noah had faith and built an ark to save his family. Abraham had faith. God called him to go to a place he would later receive as his own and he went even though he didn't know where he was going. Sarah had faith and God made it possible for her to become a mother even though she was too old to have children. Abraham was past the time when he could have children, but many children came from him. They were as many as the stars in the sky. All these people were still living by faith when they died. They didn't receive the things God had promised. There were also others - Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets. All these people were praised because they had faith, but none of them received what God had promised in the covenant. That's because God had planned something better for us, so they would only be made perfect together with us.

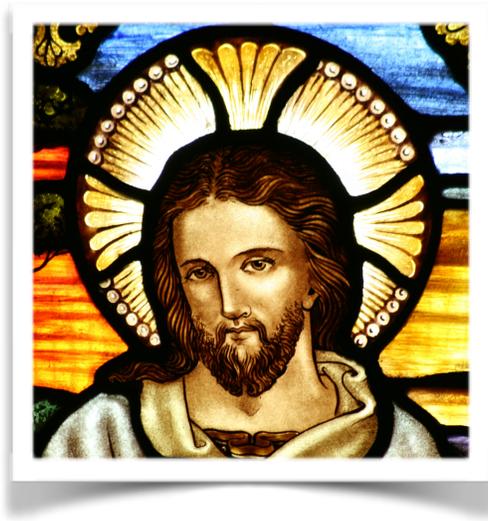
*"These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what they were promised. They would not be made right with God before us." (Hebrews 11)*

Such dedication and commitment, yet they did not receive what they were promised, until we Christians came on the scene.



# *The System Changed*

## Chapter 3



### **The Priesthood**

When Jesus arrived, He brought many changes that were very different from the way things had been done under the Old Covenant. One of those changes involved the Levitical priest system. God's law said a man from the tribe of Levi was to be the high priest for Israel. It was forbidden for any non-Levite to serve in the Tabernacle (and later on in the Temple). The rules about this were very strict. This would have disqualified Jesus from being High Priest in the Jewish Temple because He was from the tribe of Judah. No one had ever served as a priest from the tribe of Judah. The law did not allow it.

*He belonged to a different tribe, and no one from that tribe ever served at the altar.  
(Hebrews 7:13 - 14).*

Yet the Bible clearly states that Jesus is indeed our High Priest.

*Unlike the other high priests, (Jesus) does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself. For the law appoints as high priests men in all their weakness; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever. (Hebrews 7:27-28)*

Since Jesus is now our High Priest, but not from the tribe of Levi, what kind of priesthood does He belong to? The answer is suggested in a rather mysterious scripture passage found in Genesis.

*Then Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram, saying, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And praise be to God Most High who delivered your enemies into your hand." Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything. (Genesis 14:18-20)*

Melchizedek means 'king of righteousness'. This king was from Salem (Jerusalem) and he was said to be '*without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life,*' making him a very mysterious figure indeed. Melchizedek met Abraham after Abraham's defeat of 3 kings who had kidnapped the people of Sodom, including Abraham's nephew Lot and his family. Melchizedek presented bread and wine to Abraham in friendship, and he blessed Abraham in the name of God Most High. (Genesis 14:18-20). Abraham then presented Melchizedek with a tenth of all the items he had gathered from battle. In Psalm 110, David wrote concerning the Messiah: *The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: "You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek."* thereby identifying Melchizedek as a type of Christ. The superiority of Melchizedek's order over the Levitical priesthood (represented in Abraham and his ancestors) was shown when Abraham gave the tithe to Melchizedek - lower order deferring to the higher. This act showed that Abraham recognized Melchizedek as being of a higher rank than he. Because Jesus is of the Melchizedek priestly order, this indicates that Christ's new priesthood is superior to the old Levitical order and the priesthood of Aaron.

*Even the patriarch Abraham gave him a tenth of the plunder! Now the law requires the descendants of Levi who become priests to collect a tenth from the people—that is, from their fellow Israelites—even though they also are descended from Abraham. This man, however, did not trace his descent from Levi, yet he collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. And without doubt the lesser is blessed by the greater. In the one case, the tenth is collected by people who die; but in the other case, by him who is declared to be living. One might even say that Levi, who collects the tenth, paid the tenth through Abraham, because when Melchizedek met Abraham, Levi was still in the 'loins' of his ancestor. (Hebrews 7:4-10).*

Many Christians believe that Melchizedek was actually a pre-incarnate figure of Christ (Christophany). The fact that Melchizedek was without beginning of days or end of life, like Christ, makes this a distinct possibility.

## The Covenant

Since Jesus is our High Priest today, it means that the priesthood changed. Consequently the law system must have changed at some point as well. Actually, that's exactly what happened. The entire system changed! When Christians claim that the Law is still for us today but also claim Jesus as their Savior (High Priest), they are being highly inconsistent. Under the Law with its Levitical priest system, Jesus could not be the High Priest. Only a Levite could be a High Priest under the Law. The Law belongs to the old system but Jesus is from the new system. He is a High Priest, but under a different system. For this reason, the writer of Hebrews writes: *"When the priesthood is changed, the law must be changed also"* (Hebrews 7:12)

Galatians 6:2 states, *"Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ"*. The New Law was explained by Jesus in Mark 12:28-31.

*"Which commandment is the most important of all?" Jesus answered, "The most important is, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." The second is this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." There is no other commandment greater than these."*

In other words, Christ's Law is to love God, and to love others as we love ourselves. Best of all, this New Law fits in perfectly with the New Covenant. The Old Law Covenant had to change because it wasn't working. If it had been sufficient, there would have been no need to change it, but God found fault with the people who could not keep it.

*"The days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord."*

*This is the covenant I will establish with the people of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. (Hebrews 8:7-10)*

A new covenant? Some people have gone to church for years and have never even heard of the new covenant. But if we want to understand how to relate to God, we need to understand this new agreement He made with humanity.

God said that He was setting aside the first covenant and '*By calling this covenant new, (He) has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and outdated will disappear.*' (Hebrews 8:13)

Something new was coming, something completely different that God had always intended to bring, and it would make the first agreement null and void.

The book of Hebrews describes it in this way:

*The first covenant had rules for worship. It also had a sacred tent on earth. A holy tent was set up. The lamp-stand was in the first room. So was the table with its holy bread. That was called the Holy Room. Behind the second curtain was a room called the Most Holy Room. It had the golden altar for incense. It also had the wooden chest called the ark of the covenant. The ark was covered with gold. It held the gold jar of manna. It held Aaron's walking stick that had budded. It also held the stone tablets. The words of the covenant were written on them... That's how everything was arranged in the holy tent. The priests entered it at regular times. They went into the outer room to do their work for God and others, but only the high priest went into the inner room. He went in only once a year. He never entered without taking blood with him. He offered the blood for himself. He also offered it for the sins the people had committed because they didn't know any better. The animal blood sacrifices were essential because "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." (Hebrews 9:22)*

## **The Sacrifice**

As long as the Tabernacle (and later the Temple) was still standing, the way into the Holy of Holies was restricted to everyone but the Levitical high priest, and even he could only enter once a year.

*But Christ came to be the high priest... He entered the Most Holy Room by spilling his own blood. He did it once and for all time. In this way, he paid the price to set us free from sin forever.*

*The blood of goats and bulls is sprinkled on people that the law called “unclean. The people are sprinkled to make them holy. That makes them “clean” on the outside. But Christ offered himself to God without any flaw... through the power of the eternal Holy Spirit.....He did not enter a sacred tent made with human hands. That tent was only a copy of the true one. He entered heaven itself. He did it to stand in front of God for us. He is there right now. The high priest enters the Most Holy Room every year. He enters with blood that is not his own. But Christ did not enter heaven to offer himself again and again. If he had, he would have had to suffer many times since the world was created. But he has appeared once and for all time. He has come at the time when God’s work is being completed. He has come to do away with sin by offering himself... Christ was offered up once. He took away the sins of many people. ...The law was only a shadow of the good things that were coming. It is not the real things themselves. ... It isn’t possible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. So when Christ came into the world, he said, “You didn’t want sacrifices and offerings. Instead, you prepared a body for me... I have come to do what you want, my God.’ ... Jesus our priest offered one sacrifice for sins for all time. Then he sat down at the right hand of God. And since that time, he waits for his enemies to be put under his control. By that one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.... Then he adds, “I will not remember their sins anymore. I will not remember the evil things they have done.” Where these sins have been forgiven, an offering for sin is no longer necessary. (Hebrews 10)*

Not only is no other offering for sin necessary, but the Temple isn’t required anymore either. Jesus sat down at the right hand of God to show that His work was finished. That was what he meant when he cried out on the cross “It is finished!”

## **The Law**

Just as the Old Covenant was replaced by the New, including the priesthood, our relationship to the Law was also changed. The law of God given to Moses was a detailed set of rules prescribed to restrict the Israelites’ behavior as God’s chosen people. It was to have a sanctifying effect on the Israelites, protecting them from the sinful influences of the neighboring pagan nations. The moral law encompassed rules about justice, sexual conduct, and included the Ten Commandments.

The ceremonial laws focused on sacrifices and other ceremonies regarding uncleanness, as well as feasts and festivals, dietary and clothing restrictions, Sabbath, circumcision, Passover, and the redemption of the firstborn. These laws were specifically given for the Israelites and they were designed to benefit them. Paul wrote to Timothy that when used appropriately, the Law is good.

*"We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. ..We also know that the law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers...(1 Timothy 1: 8-11)*

The Bible says that the world is silenced by the law, which gives no excuse for sin and makes absolute demands for justice and righteousness.

*"Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. So nobody will be declared righteous in His sight by observing the law; Rather, through the law we become conscious of sin". (Romans 3: 19-20)*

Even the Jews did not understand how the Law worked. Jesus had to remind them how stringent the standards really were.

*"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'idiot,' is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.... ..It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery... if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins....Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matthew 5 and 6)*

These teachings must have cast a heavy shadow on the disciples and followers of Jesus. Such impossibly high standards emphasized the wide gulf between a holy God and sinful humanity. Jesus was preaching on the Law, which is not meant to comfort and encourage people into a lax relationship with the Almighty. The Law of Moses points out our human shortcomings and piles on judgment and condemnation so that we recognize our sinfulness. This is the legitimate and beneficial effect of the Law.

The desperation that Martin Luther experienced in the monastery was exactly the correct response to the Law. For him, and for anyone else living under the Law, the experience is like being a slave to a taskmaster. Even the strictest legalist is exposed by the Law which condemns him as soon as he commits a single sin. Being under the law is like being in prison. You're always being reminded that you are guilty. The law does not help us. It tears down our pride and shows us that we will never succeed. The law shows us that we are spiritually dead and we need new life. Yet many people attempt to avoid the Law's condemnation by telling themselves that God doesn't really expect perfection (although Jesus clearly indicated that He does). "Nobody's perfect" is the mantra many of us stick on our car bumpers and spout as a truism to our neighbors. The idea that God expects more of our behavior than what is humanly possible is seen as unreasonable and extreme. Yet the law makes an all or nothing demand. Either we obey the whole law, or we are cursed. There is no other option.

James teaches, *"Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it."* (James 2:10)

*'Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you are circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you. Every man who lets himself be circumcised must obey the whole law.'*  
(Galatians 5: 2-3)

The Law demands perfection and complete obedience of EVERY command. Of course, no one can meet that standard, which is why Paul called the Law a ministry of condemnation. He said that the Law kills because it puts everyone under a sentence of death for breaking it's commands.

*Now if the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end, will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory? For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, the ministry of righteousness must far exceed it in glory. (2 Corinthians 3:7-9)*

Paul is referring to the Ten Commandments because he particularly mentioned that the ministry "was engraved in letters on stone." This was true of the commandments. These commandments have the effect of arousing sin.

*"We live under the law, sin will rule over us. We are free from the law, sin shall not rule over us: "Sin will no longer be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace" (Romans 6:14).*

This idea is shocking to many Christians. They agree that salvation does not come through the Law but rather through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, yet they wonder how they can possibly live holy lives if the Ten Commandments do not guide them. It is an obvious question and Paul gave the answer.

*Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God. For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code. (Romans 7:4-6)*

Those who are led by the Spirit are not under the Law of the Old Covenant. The Law is a poor substitute for the advice of the Holy Spirit. We think that it is a good way to live to follow the Ten Commandments, but the Law actually causes us to increase sinning. Principles, rules, and standards, no matter how "Christian" we believe them to be, cannot make us holy. In fact, they bring spiritual death! Being led by God Himself is much better.

*"Since you died with Christ we are not subject to the rules of the world: the rule that says "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!" These rules will be destroyed. They are based on human commands and teachings. Such knowledge seems like a good rule, but they lack any value in preventing sin." (Colossians 2:20 - 23)*

*Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by human effort? (Galatians 3: 2-3)*

*When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. (Colossians 2:13-14)*

Paul was deeply disappointed with the Galatian Christians who had started out with the Holy Spirit, but then returned to the Old Testament Law. He was flabbergasted that they were trying to continue their walk with God by employing human effort! Many today are trying the exact same thing.

They are like the Galatians who looked back to the Law and mixed it with the grace of Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul said this was no gospel (good news) at all. In fact it was really a sinful hybrid that was stumbling the believers and robbing them of joy and freedom in Christ. Christians should not be slaves to the law. Jesus Christ has already met the requirements of the Law and He has credited the requirements of the law to those who are born of the Spirit:

*'God sent his own Son in the likeness of sinful humanity to be a sin offering. God condemned sin in the human body. The law of commands is fully met in Jesus Christ'..... "So, my brothers and sisters, you have died to the law so that you may belong to another, to Him who was raised from the dead. We have been released from the law to a new way of the Spirit so that we do not serve in the old way of the written code. (Romans 7: 4, 6; 8: 3-4)*

It's important to understand that the Law has absolutely no value as concerns making us holy. It cannot stop us from sinning.

*Some people still follow the basic spiritual powers of the world. ... Here are the rules you follow. "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!" Rules like these are about things that will pass away soon. They are based on merely human rules and teachings....But rules like these don't help. They don't stop people from chasing after sinful pleasures.... The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God. (Colossians 2:20-23; Hebrews 7:18-19)*

*Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin. But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. (Romans 3:20-22)*

# *But God Says...*

## Chapter 4



The Bible can be confusing to Christians because it seems to give two conflicting messages where grace and Law are concerned. It clearly states that the New Covenant has brought changes in the priesthood and sacrifice, and it also says that Christians are not under the Law anymore. But then why did Jesus Himself preach the Law to His followers telling them they had to be perfect in order to be accepted by God? Why were His teachings sometimes so Law-based?

*Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them. For I tell you truly, until heaven and earth pass away, not a single jot, not a stroke of a pen, will disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. (Matthew 5:18)*

The above scripture states that not even the smallest markings of the Hebrew script would pass away from the Law until it was completely fulfilled. This would include the Sabbath, sacrifices in the Temple, circumcision, tithing, purification rituals, etc. Throughout the New Testament we read that Christ's sacrificial death has indeed fulfilled these requirements of the Law and completely set aside the legal code.

*For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations.*

*His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, (Ephesians 2:14-15)*

To understand these conflicting passages, it is important to see the dividing line in history between the Old and New Covenants. Peter, James, John, and Paul all wrote about life under the new system. However many of the teachings of Jesus dealt with the Old Covenant. We often forget that Jesus was born as a Jew under the old system and His mission was to lead His people out of the old way into the new.

*"But when the time came, God's Son, born under law, came to redeem those under law, that we might receive sonship." (Galatians 4: 4-5)*

The Jews trusted in works of the Law for salvation and Jesus was guiding the people to trust in Him instead the Mosaic Law system. But He had to start where they were at. The first thing He did was bring them into an understanding that the old system could never bring eternal life. When Jesus first came to the Jews, they didn't understand that the Law could not make them spiritually alive, or that they could never attain life that way. Jesus used shock tactics to get their attention.

*"The law says that whoever murders will be judged. But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be judged." (Matthew 5: 21-22)*

*"The law says you shall not commit adultery. But I tell you, anyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery in his heart." (Matthew 5: 27-28)*

*If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell." (Matthew 5:29-30).*

Jesus used extreme examples to emphasize to His followers that this is what you have to do if you hope to keep the Law in order to escape hell. The Law condemned adultery, but Jesus took it a step farther saying that just to look at a woman with lust was the same as adultery, and this was enough to damn you to eternal perdition. Jesus said it was better to gouge out your eyes so that you couldn't see a woman to lust after her. Of course Jesus wasn't telling people to actually gouge out their eyes. He was showing how serious it was to break the Law. He was showing that every sin, even if it is just in thought, condemns people to hell.

Jesus was hoping that the Jews would give up trying to save themselves through the works of the Law. He wanted the people to see that they could never keep the Law, just as the Israelites in the Old Testament could never keep it. He wanted them to see their danger and to become desperate for a different way to be saved. Then He told them that He was bringing a new way to them.

One day Jesus told a story of a rich young man. The man was very zealous for the Law of God and had tried his best to keep it. Jesus looked at him and loved him because he saw that his heart was sincere and earnest.

*The young man said: "Since I was a boy, I have kept all these rules."*

Obviously the young zealot did not completely understand his own heart or the true nature of the Law. Jesus gently tried to enlighten him.

*One thing you lack," he said. "Sell everything. Give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven." The man's face fell. He was rich, he went away sorrowful. (Mark 10:20 – 22)*

The young Law-keeper saw at once that he had not obeyed the Law completely because he coveted his wealth and could not give it up. The apostle Paul had the same experience.

*I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of coveting. For apart from the law, sin was dead. Once I was alive apart from the law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. (Romans 7: 7-10)*

The young legalist had undoubtedly read the tenth commandment many times but had never applied it correctly to himself. Jesus, with a few direct words, made him aware that he was a sinner who, like everyone else, could not keep the Law perfectly. Jesus' instruction to sell all his belongings was meant to help the young man see into his own heart. The Lord didn't intend to let His followers deceive themselves concerning their performance under the Law. His intention was to make them very uncomfortable so that they would recognize their need for a Savior. His assertion that not even the smallest markings of the Hebrew script would pass away from the Law until it was completely fulfilled was meant to point to Himself as that Savior, for it was He who fulfilled every component of the Law.

On the cross, just before releasing His spirit to the Father, Jesus cried out, "*It is finished!*" indicating that every part of the Law had been fulfilled. From then on, the Law was no longer to function as a guardian over the people of God.

*So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian. So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. (Galatians 3:24-27)*

Paul wrote that Christians have been made right with God through faith and they were to continue to live by faith. They were not to return to the Law. They were to follow the Holy Spirit who had been given to them after they trusted in Christ. The Holy Spirit had nothing to do with the law.

*"You are led by the Spirit, you are not under law." (Galatians 5:18)*

These scriptures plainly state that the Law has no place in the life of faith. Grace (faith) operates in an entirely different way than the Law operates. The Law condemns, coerces, and threatens us to submit to its statutes, but grace motivates us to willingly say "no" to sin. It teaches, guides, and leads us to live holy lives.

*For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age. (Titus 2: 11-12)*

Since we are saved by grace through faith, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit brings about purity and that is more than enough. The grace of the Holy Spirit teaches us every day. We do not need laws to keep us under control. Grace alone is the cure for sin!

*"My grace is sufficient for you, my strength is made perfect in weakness." (2 Corinthians 12: 9)*

Note:

One portion of Matthew 5:18 is very troubling for Christians because it implies that the Law will be in effect until the end of time.

*"For I tell you truly, **until heaven and earth pass away**, not a single jot, not a stroke of a pen, will disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished."*

This verse is used by those who argue that the law of Moses is still in effect for everyone, including Christians today. However this would be a flat contradiction of all the other scriptures that say the Law of Moses does not have authority over the Christian. And Jesus made it clear that He wasn't about to fulfill only a part of the law. He would fulfill ALL the Law - moral and ceremonial - and not just the part that had to do with animal sacrifices and purification rituals.

*Then He said to them, "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in THE LAW OF MOSES AND THE PROPHETS AND THE PSALMS concerning Me." (Luke 24:44)*

To fulfill the Law means to complete it; to end it. Jesus released us from the Law of Moses by fulfilling it. So what did Jesus mean about the Law remaining until heaven and earth pass away if He has already fulfilled it?

When it comes right down to it, it all depends on how we interpret "heaven and earth" in this passage. A literal interpretation of a physical heaven and earth would mean that the Old Covenant Law is still in effect until the earth is no more.

Since it cannot mean that, the language must be figurative. The Bible often uses figurative language to describe cataclysmic happenings. When describing the destruction of Jerusalem, Jesus said in Luke 21:22 that the disciples were already in the "*days of vengeance in which all things that are written must be fulfilled.*" He told them plainly that their "*generation (would) not pass away until all things take place.*"

Then Jesus added that "*heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words will by no means pass away.*" Both Luke 21 and Matthew 5:17-18 refer to the passing of heaven and earth and the fulfillment of all prophecy. These were references to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

In Isaiah 13:1-13, a prophecy was given against the nation of Babylon. "*Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth will move out of her place.*" The language makes it sound like a worldwide destruction was going to happen, but it was referring to Babylon's destruction in 539 BC. When the Medes destroyed Babylon (Isaiah 13:17), the Babylonian world came to an end. The physical heaven and earth did not end, but for Babylon they had collapsed. This is apocalyptic language which is obviously figurative.

In Isaiah 34:3-5, there is a description of the fall of Edom described in similar language "*...and the mountains shall be melted with their blood. And all the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll: and all their host shall fall down...*"

*For my sword shall be **bathed in heaven**: behold, it shall come down upon Idumea, and upon the people of my curse, to judgment.*" This language was meant to describe Edom's fall as a nation, not the end of the world.

What Jesus was saying in Matthew 5:17-18 was that the Law would not end until all prophecy had been fulfilled concerning the fall of Jerusalem and the end of the Old Covenant age. That was when the Temple would be destroyed, just as Jesus had foretold. The Temple represented the Old Covenant age (and the Law was associated with it). This occurred in 70 AD, while Jesus' disciples were still around to see it, just as He said they would be.

### WHAT ABOUT THE SABBATH?

Once we, as Christians, know that we are under grace and not under the Law, certain legal traditions become suspect. We wonder how such things as Sunday worship and tithing fit into this new life of grace. Weekly Sabbath observance and tithing are rooted in the Law. If we impose these on believers today, we are implying that believers should follow the Law, and that means all of it because the Law is an all-or-nothing system. It cannot be applied in one part and not another.

For Jews, the Sabbath, the seventh day of creation, was a reminder of God resting after His work. God commanded Israel to remember the Sabbath day and to use it for rest. It was to be a special day of remembering how God rested after six days of working on His glorious creation. As part of the Law, the Sabbath had to be fulfilled by Jesus. The Bible states plainly that Jesus is God's true Sabbath rest. This is another way of saying that Jesus is our salvation from the works of the Law.

*There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; Those who enter into God's rest also rest from their own works, as God did from his. We, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest. (Hebrews 4: 9-11)*

The Sabbath was only a shadow. It foreshadowed the coming of a Rest that would free humanity from striving to keep the Law. Every Christian now lives within this Rest - within Jesus Christ - and is consequently at peace with God and free from all the pressures he once experienced under the Law.

## WHAT ABOUT TITHING?

Concerning tithing, many people think that Christians should give 10 percent of their income to the church or they are "robbing God." (They justify this view by referring to an Old Testament scripture -Malachi 3:8). Some pastors are especially concerned that this part of the Old Covenant remain in effect in order to keep the churches' finances solvent, but as mentioned earlier, this would mean making the entire Law applicable to believers for to be under one law is to be under the whole. More ominously, it would put the pastor under the curse of Paul for preaching a mixture of Law and grace.

At one time the tithe was necessary. After Israel conquered Canaan, the tribes divided the land, but the tribe of Levi did not get land because they were to be priests for the Tabernacle. As priests they could not have homes or land but rather received support from the other tribes. The law commanded that they get 10%. That was the reason for the tithe. However today, if a pastor of the Church teaches that Christians should tithe 10 percent to the church, it is teaching Law. God says Christians should give offerings from a happy heart and not under compulsion (law). Believers are free to give 1 percent, 10 percent, or 100 percent.

*Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. (2 Corinthians 9: 7).*

## WHAT ABOUT CONFESSION?

Confession is practiced in many Churches because of 1John 1:9 in the New Testament.

*"If we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness"?*

Traditionally the verse has been understood to mean that God's salvation is dependent on the confession of our sins. This is the way the Roman Catholic Church interprets this passage. Many Protestant churches do not go as far as saying that confession is necessary for salvation, but they do hold that fellowship with God is dependent on it. Consequently this verse has caused many Christians to feel uncomfortable with the Lord, fearing they have incurred His displeasure by forgetting to confess ALL their sins to Him.

This interpretation of the scripture also places God in the role of legal Examiner, thus hindering the Christian's relationship with God as a loving Father.

1John1:9 is actually not even speaking to true believers. It is addressing some people in the Church who professed to be Christians but who proclaimed that they had never sinned. They were from the Gnostic sect. Gnosticism was actually opposed to Christianity because of its false teaching that anything done in the body, even the grossest sin, didn't matter, because real life exists in the spirit realm only. Gnostics thought they were superior because they had a deeper, secret knowledge of God, which they said was necessary for salvation. Although they claimed to follow Jesus and His teachings, the Gnostics contradicted Him at every turn. These are the ones John was addressing, telling them that they needed to admit (confess) that they were sinners so that they could be saved. Unless the Gnostics agreed that they needed to be forgiven for sins committed in the body, they were not saved.

*"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (1John 1:8).*

Everyone who wishes to become a believer in Christ must admit that he is a sinner. Someone who claims he has never sinned is not a Christian. So here John is concerned for unbelievers who claimed to be Christians but were not. He firmly stated that saying we have never sinned makes us liars who don't have Christ. Such people are not real Christians, but rather they are wolves trying to look like Jesus' sheep.

Another scripture that troubles Christians is James 5:16 which seems to make God's healing dependent on confession.

*Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.*

The apostle James is saying that we are to confess our sins to each other so that others can pray for us. Prayer for healing is a normal part of the church. James' exhortation to confess our sins to one another is not meant as a conditional requirement for God's forgiving or cleansing us. Confessing sin does not bring cleansing into a Christian's life. We've already been cleansed "once for all" through the onetime blood sacrifice. Our fellowship with God cannot be broken. When we sin, Jesus' Spirit is there to help us learn from our mistake. However, being sorry for sin is normal for Christians.

Being sorry for sin leads a believer to desire change because we are designed for good works, not sins. We're meant to display the life of Jesus Christ.

### WHAT ABOUT PRAYER?

In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus taught his disciples to say, "*Forgive us our sins*" (Luke 11:4) which is asking for God's forgiveness. This raises the question of how this fits in with once-for-all forgiveness in Christ? There is also the scripture that seems to make God's forgiveness of our sins dependent on our own forgiveness of others.

*"If you forgive others when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your sins, your Father will not forgive you." (Matthew 6:14-15)*

*Jesus prayed, "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Matthew 6:12).*

Why would Jesus say this about earning forgiveness through forgiving others? Again, we must remember that Jesus often spoke to the Jews as under the Law. That is exactly the case in these passages where He was showing that under the Old Covenant God's standards were incredibly high and His forgiveness was conditional on human behavior. Of course no one can forgive others perfectly. The Lord's Prayer is actually an Old Covenant prayer. When Jesus taught Jews how to pray, His blood had not yet been shed and the New Covenant had not begun. Later, through Jesus Christ's sacrifice, God provided a way to forgiveness that does not involve trying to keep impossible standards. Through this sacrifice, God has made us perfect in His sight and He has declared us 'not guilty'. The book of Hebrews tells us that God doesn't remember our sins anymore.

*For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more. (Hebrews 8:12)*  
*Then he adds: "Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more." (Hebrews 10:17).*

God has declared that He keeps no record of our wrongs. We can't begin to pay him back. He has released us from what we owe Him and our forgiveness rests solely on what was accomplished at Calvary. This is the amazing forgiveness that God *chose* for us through the finished work of his Son. Knowing that we are forgiven completely is important because it enables us to more easily forgive others. We see others as God sees them. We focus on our newness and Christ's presence within us and then our behavior changes.

*"As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you." (Colossians 3: 12-14)*

# Changed on the Inside

## Chapter 5



When we place our faith in Christ's work, things happen on the inside of us that are monumental, although they are unseen on the outside. At the moment of regeneration, the Holy Spirit enters our human spirit and effects a life-changing transformation. Positionally we move out of the line of Adam's life (who brought us into spiritual death through his sin) and into the life of Christ (who brought us eternal life through His death and resurrection). We become part of a new family. At the deepest level, we are a changed person - an ALIVE person. Now we are in Christ and He is in us.

*For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. (Colossians 3:3).*

The place we are in now is completely different from where we were before. Our new spiritual condition lifted us out of a dark realm and translated us into the kingdom of light. The Bible states that as sinners we were like Adam, but through our new position in Christ, we become saints with a nature like Christ's. We are spiritually alive and righteous.

*"He delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his dear Son." (Colossians 1:13)*

*But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us **alive** with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. (Ephesians 2:4-5)*

This transferral is so astounding that it can be hard for the human mind to grasp. We can understand that Jesus Christ was crucified and buried, but do we realize that we were also spiritually crucified and buried with Him? Do we comprehend that as we entered into Christ's salvation, our old self was done away with?

*“We were baptized into Christ ... our old self was crucified with him, we are buried with him through baptism”. (Romans 6:3-4, 6)*

*(The old self is also called the “old man” in Adam. Adam represents all of sinful mankind with a nature that is spiritually dead.)*

For a short time, Jesus Christ was on earth like one of us. He was in the likeness of sinful flesh, although He never sinned and didn't have the dead sin nature of Adam. The curse of death did not apply to Him but Jesus willingly volunteered to represent sinful mankind, becoming a second Representative of humanity - the Second Adam. Being human was essential if the Second Adam was to take on Himself the penalty for sin. And being sinless was essential if the Second Adam was to escape death and resurrect into new life. This is what Jesus did for us. He became the New Creation, a new humanity that had never existed before. The entrance into this New Creation happens the moment we trust Jesus as our Redeemer. When that happens, we are reborn to become new creatures with His life and nature formed within us. Those who do not accept Jesus as their Savior remain in the old humanity (old man in Adam) and are eternally separated from God.

*For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. (Colossians 3:3-4)*

Today Jesus is sitting in heaven with God, and so are we! We are joined to Him! We are joined to the risen Christ and we are declared totally righteous in Him.

*God raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2: 7).*

What a marvelous revelation! Seated with Christ in the heavenlies; in-dwelt by the Holy Spirit who is our Counselor, Helper, Comforter, and Advocate; and made clean and perfect through the sacrifice of Christ without one sin to condemn us.

*Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. (Romans 8:1)*

As if that isn't enough, we also have the Holy Spirit praying for us (Romans 8:26) and assuring us that we are God's children. (Romans 8:16). He also trains and teaches us, and when we sin, He reminds us of Jesus' work on the cross by which we were made pure for good deeds.

Unfortunately we still have an enemy - Satan - who tries to tempt us. What many Christians cannot understand is why this is even possible if the old nature is gone? Why do Christians still sin? When reading Romans 7: 14-20, which was Paul's experience under the Law, some believers assume that this scripture applies to them. They think that they must have two natures, a good one and a bad one, because Paul's struggle seems so similar to their own, and he seemed to imply there was an evil force foreign to himself doing the sinning. They believe that they must struggle with their sinful nature and that it is a natural thing for them to sin.

*We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. (Romans 7:14-20)*

Paul, as a Jew under the Law, was delineating between the desires of his conscience and the sinful tendency inside him that was always at war within him. He said it felt like there was an evil force fighting against his heart. He loved his Jewish religion and he loved the Law.

He wanted to be obedient to God and to live righteously, but this force kept causing him to fall into sin. Paul was controlled by his sin nature which dominated his flesh. In Romans 8:13 Paul stated that if we live according to the flesh, we will die; but if by the Spirit we put to death the misdeeds of the body, we will live. However Paul did not have the Holy Spirit while he was still under the Law, so he had no power over sin. This is what this scripture is emphasizing - that the Law gives no power over sin. Yet Paul was still able to do some good things, meaning he could still perform some commendable deeds in response to his conscience (the Law written on everyone's heart). Unfortunately these good deeds, if not motivated by faith in a believing heart, are of no eternal value and still constitute living in the flesh. The flesh also desires to be religious and pious, as were the Pharisees who opposed Jesus, and this was certainly true of Paul as well. Poor Paul was so desperate about his situation that he cried out: *What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?* Then he gives the answer: *Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Romans 7:24)*

Of course even though Christians have the Holy Spirit, and therefore power over sin, they do sometimes sin, causing a struggle within that robs them of joy and confidence in the Lord. That is why this scripture about Paul's struggle under the Law sounds so familiar to believers. But this struggle is not because we have two natures, as though we are spiritually schizophrenic now that we have become believers in Christ. Christians have only one nature.

*'He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.'* (2 Peter 1:4)

We are now partakers of God's divine nature but we still struggle against the flesh (body of sin). Remember, this is not the same as the old sin nature. That was done away with through the sacrifice of Christ. The old nature is the essence of a person cut off from God - an unbeliever. Christians no longer belong to the old humanity that is doomed. We have been lifted out of that realm entirely. The sin nature of the old man is not ours anymore.

However we still have what is called the 'flesh'. It is important to understand that there is a difference between the terms "flesh" and "sinful nature" in the Bible. The flesh (body) is from the earth.

It is where we get a sense of who we are - how smart we are, the way we look, our status. The flesh includes our body, reason, and all other faculties, and these, together with our spirit, comprise the soul. The soul and the spirit are connected, but separate (Hebrews 4:12), the soul being the essence of our being and the spirit being what connects us with God. In unbelievers, the soul is imperishable but the spirit is dead towards God. Unbelievers have no connection with God spiritually. In Christians the soul has a new spirit which is characterized by the divine nature and this allows it to link spiritually with God. This new creation spirit is now our identity. It's who we are - saints of the most High God.

*1Corinthians 1:2* addresses believers this way: *"To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours."*

Christians are to live from their spirit so that communion with God is intimate and perpetual. The spirit is to have the preeminence in influencing the mind to think true thoughts and the emotions to respond accordingly. In other words, the reborn spirit is to be boss over the soul. Unfortunately Christians sometimes slip back into old patterns and habits that were operative when they were unbelievers. These remnants from the old man still influence some of our thinking and emotions. These, along with the lusts still stirring within our bodies, make up the flesh. Living according to the flesh is the opposite of living in the Spirit and it is ridiculous to even think that we can live as Christians in this way. This is what the apostle Paul accused the Galatians of trying to do.

*"Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?" (Galatians 3:3).*

When the Bible mentions people living in the flesh, it is referring to those who live according to earthly principles with minds and emotions programmed by the sin nature. This includes the lusts for sex, food, power, and even religion. Christians are never to live according to the flesh (body). To do so is completely counter to a true experience of salvation in Jesus.

*Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace.*

*The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God. (Romans 8:5-8)*

But Paul told the Christians that they weren't in the flesh, even though they still had the flesh (and would have it until their bodies died).

*You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. (Romans 8:9)*

What he meant was that the flesh was not in control of their lives. Paul used the picture of the Jewish rite of circumcision under the Old Covenant to explain that we, as Christians, have been spiritually circumcised because the body of flesh has been cut off from our reborn spirit. The flesh can no longer dominate us like it did when we had the old nature. This is what physical circumcision under the Law had been foreshadowing all along, but the Jews hadn't understood it's meaning. Believers in Christ still have the flesh, but they are not OF the flesh (do not live by the flesh). They live by the Holy Spirit who dwells within their new nature.

*In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ. (Colossians 2:11)*

Yet the re-education of the mind and emotions of a Christian is still needed in order to bring them into conformity with the truth of Christ. Having a new nature is the main thing, but re-education is essential for that new nature to function properly through our thoughts and emotions. The Holy Spirit facilitates this education process by directly instructing our minds through our new, reborn spirit.

*You were taught to stop your old way of life. Your old way was full of deceitful desires. Now you are to be made new in the attitude of your minds. (Ephesians 4: 20-23)*

Paul reminded the Galatians that they were not in the realm of the flesh because of the Holy Spirit living inside them. When we depend on the Holy Spirit we are really being ourselves.



# *Will Christians Be Judged?*

## Chapter 6



Revelation 20:11–15 talks about God sitting on a great white throne after the universe has ended, and all the dead from everywhere, great and small, stand before Him while books are opened to examine their deeds. One of the books is called the Book of Life. Anyone whose name isn't found in this Book is thrown into a lake of fire, a place of eternal separation from God. These people are all unbelievers who have rejected God and want nothing to do with Him anyway. No Christian is present at this Judgement.

*“He who believes in Jesus is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the Son of God” (John 3:18).*

The Bible affirms that Christians are not judged for sin as the Lord Jesus has taken that judgement upon Himself. However the Bible does say that the works of Christians are tested to see if they can endure.

*Jesus Christ is the foundation. If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is. Fire will test the quality of each person's work.' (1 Corinthians 3:11-13)*

Misinterpreting this passage can lead to much confusion in the Church. If God has a merit system that grades the believer on his efforts, then there would be a hierarchy in heaven, with some Christians having greater favor than others. Some Christians hold this view. Others believe that the Bible teaches that all Christians will receive the same rewards in heaven and our works here on earth merit us nothing in heaven. The latter group believes that if a Christian believes he will get a bigger reward for working harder for God, he may have the wrong motivation for serving God. Instead of serving Him out of gratitude for His love, his service would merely be works-based with the hopes of getting greater gain or recognition. Actually the above scripture simply indicates that motives will be exposed when the Christian stands before God, so as to correctly discern the quality of the works he has done. However no scale of merits is mentioned. This is because the only works that make it through the test of fire are faith works.

*And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. (Hebrews 11:6)*

We are saved by faith and we walk by faith. The only works that have any eternal value are those born of faith. But this faith is not something we conjure up within ourselves or something we earn. It is given to us by God.

*For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)*

Our faith can falter at times, especially during trials, which God uses to sharpen and strengthen us, but even the testing of our faith produces perseverance which the Holy Spirit works in us. He doesn't let us give up, but keeps encouraging and comforting us in our walk. Our entire life is a faith experience from start to end. In fact Jesus is called the Author and Finisher of our faith.

*...looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:2)*

The faith Jesus Christ has placed within our hearts, and which the Holy Spirit develops and strengthens, is the same overcoming force that Jesus has. Every Christian has this kind of faith.

*...for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. (1John 5:4)*

The Scriptures indicate that we're married to an eternal, risen Christ, a heavenly Husband, who has already defeated the world. But the Church, as the Bride of Christ, is said to be seated with Christ in the heavenlies. Just as He has overcome the world, so have we! Jesus has made us over-comers and intends for us to experience His victory fully. In fact, we can't be anything except over-comers if we truly belong to Him!

*I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world. (John 16:33)*

It is not surprising that every promise of reward given to the Churches in Revelation was all about victory and overcoming.

*To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God. (Revelation 2:7)*

*Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who is victorious will not be hurt at all by the second death. (Revelation 2:11)*

*To the one who is victorious, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it. (Revelation 2:17)*

*To the one who is victorious and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations— that one 'will rule them with an iron scepter and will dash them to pieces like pottery'—just as I have received authority from my Father. I will also give that one the morning star. (Revelation 2:26-28)*

*The one who is victorious will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life, but will acknowledge that name before my Father and his angels. (Revelation 3:5)*

*The one who is victorious I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will they leave it. I will write on them the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on them my new name. (Revelation 3:12)*

*To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne. (Revelation 3:21)*

Each and every promise and reward listed by Jesus belongs to every Christian believer. We eat from the tree of life; we are immune from the second death; we have a new identity that is pure and righteous; we have authority to rule spiritually over nations; we will never have our name blotted out of the Book of Life; we will dwell with God in the heavenly Jerusalem; and we will sit with Christ and the Father on His throne. Our spiritual Husband, Jesus Christ, has provided everything we need right here and now to overcome every obstacle. These are the rewards of the believer.

There are also at least 6 crowns mentioned in the Bible.

*Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is disciplined in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown” (1Corinthians 9:24,25)*

*For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?” (1Thessalonians 2:19)*

*Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing. (2Timothy 4:8)*

*And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. (1Peter 5:4)*

*Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor's crown (Revelation 2:10)*

*Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him. (James 1:12)*

These crowns are also applicable to every believer in Christ. The Bible says that Jesus has made us kings and priests, righteous and perfect in the presence of God.

*You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth." (Revelation 5:10)*

*But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks better word than the blood of Abel. (Hebrews 12:22-24)*

*"In Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority" (Colossians 2:9-10).*

In Revelation 4:10-11 we see a scene in heaven of twenty-four elders falling down before Jesus who sits on the throne. They lay their crowns before the throne and say: *'You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.'* They indicate that, in spite of what they have done on earth to earn those crowns, only Jesus is truly worthy of glory and honor. In the presence of the Lord Jesus Himself, all good deeds we have done will pale in comparison. A crown will seem an insignificant gift to present to the One who gave His life for us.

With such a high position and status, we can easily see why Paul urges believers to walk in a manner worthy of their calling.

*As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. (Ephesians 4: 1)*

*"Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your life in that way, (Colossians 2: 6), meaning by faith.*

We do not let sin reign in us because we wish to live up to all that we are in Christ. And so we set our minds on things above.

In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus...*And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus. (Romans 6:11; Ephesians 2: 6).*

We have within us a wonderful life, and because we already are different on the inside, we can live differently in the outside world.

*Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires...Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. (Romans 6:12; Colossians 3: 2).*

Development is not by trying harder. We are complete and lacking in nothing. The only proper response is to remind each other of these extraordinary truths and spend our lives giving thanks to God. We do not try to imitate Christian behavior. We live from the life inside us, which is the life of Jesus Christ. We are partakers of the divine nature. The Holy Spirit works in our divine nature to live lives pleasing to God. The Holy Spirit does not overpower us and He does not go against our will. Instead, He wants to lead us by His wisdom as we allow Him to guide us through our personality. Since Christ is our life, we can only be happy when we are revealing Him. As we reveal Christ, we also express what God has created us to be. God will not make us do the things we do not want. Instead, the Bible tells us that God causes the Christian to **want** God's will.

*...for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose. (Philippians 2:13).*

This means that we will actually want what God wants. It will be our greatest desire *'to make every effort to add to our faith goodness, and to goodness, knowledge, and to knowledge, self-control, and to self-control, perseverance, and to perseverance, godliness, and to godliness, mutual affection, and to mutual affection, love. ... (2 Peter 1:5-9)*

This is the grace gospel that was preached by Paul and the apostles to the early church. Wherever Christians did not understand this message, there were problems, just as today there are problems in so many churches because this gospel is not known. Too often the Galatian gospel (which Paul said was really no gospel at all) is being taught instead. This false gospel is really no different from the works-salvation of the world's religions. Hinduism, Buddhism, animism, Islam, etc all labor under law systems that attempt to reach God through meritorious endeavor. When Christianity is taught in a similar fashion, it becomes just another human religion that cannot offer rest or fulfillment. This is why so many Christians in the west and elsewhere, even though they have beautiful buildings to worship in, music programs, well-known speakers, and Christian books, are still unhappy and depressed. They are not hearing the true gospel. Without the grace gospel, there can be no lasting joy or victory in the Christian walk. Perhaps this is the greatest weakness in the Church today. And perhaps, getting this gospel of God's grace into our churches will once again fill the empty pews and bring revival and blessing to the land.





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