

Walking with Christ

Transforming Truths for the Christian Life

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Course Introduction

Walking with Christ is designed to encourage you in your Christian life by presenting truths that are transforming. In this course you will learn more about what it means to really depend upon Jesus Christ in your daily life. Trusting in the person of Christ for our salvation is the first step of faith we take that sets us upon the pathway that is the Christian life. This first step is to be followed by many other steps of faith as we deepen our trust in God and His Word.

When we think of the word “walk,” we think of moving along or going in a certain direction. The physical act of walking also has spiritual significance in the Bible. Walking represents the whole range of human activity or the whole manner of a person’s life and conduct. The Bible frequently contrasts the way in which believers and unbelievers “walk,” indicating that the believer’s life and conduct is to be clearly distinguished from that of the unbeliever. How do these changes take place in us? How do we become more like Christ? We will explore these questions together in this course.

When we walk, we must lift our back foot and leave the place where we were in order to move ahead. So it is in the Christian life; we are invited to lift our feet, to leave behind the place where we have been, and to step out on the pathway that stretches before us.

As we walk, each step takes us closer to our destination. So it is in our daily walk with Christ; we progress gradually toward the goal of becoming like Him. If we stumble somewhere along the way, we do not have to go back to the beginning of our journey and start over again. Christ is there to lift us up and help us to keep moving ahead.

When we begin this walk with Christ, we do not know where it will lead. The road is unknown. But we have the assurance that He will walk beside us every step of the way. As you study this course, may you be encouraged to lift your feet, leaving behind the place where you have been, and to place your hand each day in the hand of the Savior, who calls you to come ahead and walk with Him.

Course Description

Walking with Christ has been designed to encourage you in your daily life with Christ. The main goal of studying such a course is to develop a deeper, more intimate relationship with God: to know Him more and to love Him more. A clear understanding of the work of Jesus Christ in our salvation and our spiritual growth is essential for every believer. The course begins by establishing this foundation. Further, it explores the multifaceted work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. As we grow in our understanding of these truths, we will grow in our love for God and our desire to honor Him and serve Him.

Two major themes emphasized throughout this course are the importance of the Word of God and prayer. The Bible is the central source through which God's Spirit speaks to us and influences our lives. The intention of this course is to whet your appetite for God's Word and to acquaint you with some basic skills necessary for properly and consistently feeding yourself from God's Word.

While God communicates with us by means of the Scriptures, we also have the great privilege of communicating with Him through prayer. This course provides both practical teaching on prayer and encouragement to develop a more consistent prayer life. Hearing God's voice through Scripture and consistently communicating with Him form the framework for the believer's personal relationship with God.

Another key emphasis in the course is the emphasis on growth in godly character and maturity. Each lesson is designed to motivate you to think about the development of godly character and encourage you to examine your present application of truth to life, which leads toward spiritual maturity.

We speak frequently of Christlikeness, godliness, and conformity to the image of Christ. Underlying these concepts is the life of Christ Himself and the way He perfectly used His Godlike human capacities to always move toward knowledge, righteousness, holiness, and, above all, love. Because we were created in the image of God and as believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, we have similar capacities to move toward these godly character qualities that reflect the image and character of Christ.

In addition, this course seeks to provide a fresh, biblical understanding of key subjects that are essential to the life of the believer. It explores questions related to the topics of faith, guidance, Christian stewardship, the role of suffering in the life of the believer, life in the family of God, and service to God and others. Questions are used to guide the student through some key biblical passages that relate to each of these issues, to encourage the student to think further about these issues, and to make personal application to life.

The believer's motivation for walking life's pathway with Christ is also addressed. The reality of heaven and the world to come are considered, as is the

reality of Satan and his many tactics designed to hinder us from walking with Christ. This course is aimed at helping the student move toward maturity and faithfulness, as you use the resources God has provided for you to live the Christian life.

Contributions to Developing Character

When we allow the Holy Spirit to direct our lives, the result will be growth in godly character. Each lesson in this course includes questions to encourage you to examine your life, to make godly choices, and to consider how you respond to the Holy Spirit. Lesson 3 focuses more specifically on the development of godly character as an outworking of the believer's relationship with Christ.

Contributions to Acquiring Ministry Skills

Several ministry skills are related to this course. Beginning steps are introduced for the following ministry skills, and opportunities are provided for developing these skills.

Evangelizing. The course provides a clear explanation of the gospel and requires the student to be able to articulate the gospel. The student is encouraged to think through issues that are essential to the gospel and to distinguish issues that are peripheral, as well as those that are cultural rather than biblical in nature. The course challenges you to respond to Christ's Great Commission to go and make disciples of all nations and suggests practical ways you can begin to do this in your own setting. You are required to share your faith in a personal encounter and are encouraged to develop relationships that can open the door to future contacts for evangelism. Evangelism is discussed in a wider context of your impact on those around you.

Discipling. *Walking with Christ* is itself a handbook on discipleship. You are presented with key concepts that are essential for every believer to live as a disciple of Christ, as well as personal applications and helpful assignments related to discipleship. If you work through the course with diligence, you should gain an understanding of what it means to be a disciple of Christ, as well as some helpful tools that you can then pass on to others you are discipling.

Contributions to Developing Relationships

This course encourages you to think about the importance of relationships, beginning with your relationship with God and extending to your relationship with family, friends, other believers, and the world around you. Personal reflections are designed to encourage you to consider the effects of your behavior and your choices on others and to develop in the areas of caring for, loving, and serving others. Help is provided for the student in the form of practical teaching in areas related to developing relationships, such as communication skills, forgiveness, and conflict resolution.

Relationship to Servant Leadership

Walking with Christ presents Jesus Christ as our great example of what it means to be a servant-leader and calls each student to a closer relationship with Him. Many assignments ask the student to examine the model of Christ, as well as the models of other godly men and women. As students develop in Christlike character, the result of this closer walk with Jesus will be a natural outflow of love and service to others.

Course Tasks

1. Select one passage to study. Using a simple Bible study method, identify the main subject and main truth communicated in the passage. Record what you have learned in studying the passage.
2. Make a plan to help you grow in areas of your Christian life as you consider the following aspects of your life as a disciple: time in the Word and in prayer, stewardship, involvement in fellowship and service, and sharing your faith. Find a mature Christian who will encourage your growth in these areas.
3. Choose an area of ministry related to evangelism or discipleship and participate in this ministry. After completing it, write a one-page summary, describing the ministry and your involvement and evaluating your experience.

Course Outline

Lesson 1	Christ: Our Solid Foundation
Lesson 2	Our Supernatural Resources
Lesson 3	Becoming More Like Christ
Lesson 4	Our Daily Nourishment: The Word of God
Lesson 5	Communicating with God in Prayer
Lesson 6	Living by Faith
Lesson 7	Walking with Our Guide
Lesson 8	Living as God's Steward
Lesson 9	Understanding Suffering
Lesson 10	Life in the Family
Lesson 11	A Life of Ministry
Lesson 12	Finishing the Race

Course Objectives

When you have completed this course you will be able to:

1. Experience a renewed desire to deepen your relationship with God and to walk daily with Christ, relying on Him for your growth in Christlike character.
2. Cite appropriate Scriptures to explain the essence of the gospel and how one continues to grow as a Christian.
3. Develop a plan for growing in your relationship with God that includes the Word, prayer, stewardship, fellowship, and service.
4. Explain why faith, guidance, and God's Word are important in living the Christian life.
5. Relate the role of suffering in the testing of our faith to the value suffering has in our spiritual growth.
6. Defend the statement that "every Christian is to minister" and justify the importance of both evangelism and discipleship.
7. Evaluate your growth in Christian character during your time of study.
8. Demonstrate progress toward acquiring the ministry skills of evangelizing and discipling by successfully doing the course tasks.

Walking with Christ in Relation to the Total Curriculum

Walking with Christ is designed to be the foundational course of the Entrust curriculum, as it deals with basic truths and teaching that are essential for every believer to live as a disciple of Christ. Core teaching is provided in the areas of salvation and growth in holiness. Understanding these truths will help you build your life on a solid foundation. We recommend that this course be used first in the sequence of Entrust courses.

Icons



Assignment: a question or study that focuses on course content. Written responses are required and are to be recorded in the student's notebook



Personal Reflection: an instruction to reflect on scriptural truths or character traits or both as they relate to one's walk with God. The focus is on personal application. A written response may be requested.



Adoration: an instruction to worship the Lord with reference to course content. The focus is on God. No written response is required.

Christ: Our Solid Foundation

When Robert was asked how he thought one can get to heaven or have eternal life, he said, “Try to live a good life, be kind to others, and do things to help them. Be an honest person.” In answer to the question, “Do you think you will go to heaven?” he replied, “I hope so. I think I’ve done more good things than bad in my life. I give to charity. I’ve never murdered anyone. I guess I stand as good a chance as anyone else.”



Robert’s view of what it takes to get to heaven is a view that is widely held. As we begin this course on the Christian life, we want to look at the biblical teaching on what it means to be a Christian and how we can get to heaven. How does a person become a Christian? What role do faith and good works play in the life of the believer? We hope you will be encouraged and uplifted as you explore the solid foundation laid for our faith by Jesus Christ.

Lesson Outline

- What Does It Mean to Be a Christian?
 - The First “Christians”
 - Experiencing a Personal Encounter with Christ
 - The Insurmountable Obstacle
 - Understanding Our Need for Salvation
 - God’s Provision for Our Salvation
 - The Basis of Our Salvation
 - The Uniqueness of Christianity
 - Receiving the Gift of Salvation
 - What about Other Paths to God?
- Living the Christian Life
 - Continuing the Christian Life by Faith
 - Set Free to Serve
- Concluding Thoughts

Lesson Objectives

When you have completed this lesson, you will be able to:

1. Define grace and explain the results of grace in the believer's life.
2. Explain how one becomes a Christian, using the Bible to explain your views.
3. Describe how one continues the Christian life, including the role of faith, good works, and grace in the life of the believer.
4. Evaluate your own life in terms of your understanding of grace and your application of these truths to your Christian experience.

What Does It Mean to Be a Christian?

Many people have a vague idea of what it means to be a Christian. Often people assume that, if they believe in God and attend church, they are Christians. What does it mean to be a Christian or to live a Christian life?



What thoughts come to your mind when you hear the phrase “the Christian life”? Note some of your first impressions.

The First “Christians”

The book of Acts describes the activities of the disciples of Jesus following His crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension into heaven. In Acts 11 we find Paul and Barnabas meeting with a group of new believers at Antioch in Syria, teaching and grounding them in their faith. It was in this setting at Antioch (present-day Turkey) that the disciples of Jesus were first called “Christians,” which means “followers of Christ.”

Probably coined by nonbelievers, the term “Christian” soon became established as the obvious title and was widely used within a single generation. The word was used of those who demonstrated a commitment to follow Christ. When a person gave testimony of believing in Jesus Christ as Savior, that person was then associated with the very name of Christ.

To live a Christian life means to be a follower of Jesus, associated with and belonging to Him.

Experiencing a Personal Encounter with Christ

How does one become a Christian? To become part of the family of God, we need to have a personal encounter with God's Son, Jesus Christ. While Jesus lived and ministered on earth, He mingled with and spoke to people on every level of society,

from the most prominent to the most rejected. In many conversations Jesus showed that He was seeking those who wanted to know how to find God, and He wanted them to know how to have eternal life.

Let us look at three of these encounters.

Jesus’ encounter with a religious ruler. In John’s gospel we have a record of Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. Nicodemus was a respected religious teacher and a member of the ruling council in Jerusalem.



Read John 3:1-18. What is necessary for us to enter the kingdom of God, to have eternal life?

Jesus’ encounter with the woman at the well. In the very next chapter John turns from the religious Jewish leader Nicodemus to an unnamed Samaritan woman. The placement of these two accounts back to back is surely not an accident, as John, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, shows us the contrast between the “righteous” Jewish leader and the “immoral” Samaritan woman.

Samaritans and Jews had a long-standing hate relationship, primarily due to religious differences.¹ As a Samaritan woman she would be considered unclean by Jews. As an immoral woman, she would be an outcast both to her own people and to Jews.



Read John 4:1-30, 39-42 and answer the following questions:

1. How did Jesus treat this woman?
2. What did He know about her?
3. What do you think He meant by “living water”?
4. As you read the story, what changes did you see in the Samaritan woman?
5. What was the result of her testimony in town?

The Samaritan woman’s encounter with Jesus was a life-changing experience that brought forgiveness and hope to one who had been looking for love all of her life. She found what her heart truly longed for in the love of God, and she was transformed by that love.

Jesus’ encounter with a tax collector. In the Gospel of Matthew the disciple Matthew recalls the way in which Jesus called him to be one of His followers. As a tax collector, Matthew was a hated figure among the Jews. The Pharisees, religious

leaders of the day who followed a strict moral code, complained to Jesus' disciples, "Why is your Teacher eating with the tax collectors and sinners?" They were implying that, if Jesus were a man of God, He would only want to associate with those who lived a good and moral life, men like themselves, for example.



Read Matthew 9:9-12 and answer the following questions:

1. What do you think Jesus meant in His reply to the Pharisees in verse 12?
2. Why do you think the Pharisees may have found it more difficult to become followers of Christ?

Jesus was not telling the Pharisees that they were righteous in themselves and had no need of a Savior but pointing out that they were not aware of their own sinfulness. Thus, the condition for salvation is recognizing our personal need of it.

We have looked at three encounters in which Jesus offered words of invitation to three people from various backgrounds: Nicodemus, a respected religious ruler; the Samaritan woman, a social and moral outcast; and Matthew, a wealthy but hated Jewish businessman. Jesus' example indicates that all are welcome in God's kingdom.

In God's eyes there is no difference between Jew and non-Jew, between religious people and atheists, between the most decent moral person and the most degenerate.² **Ultimately, all human beings fall into the same sinful category** (Rom 3:22-23). All three of the individuals with whom Jesus met had two things in common—their sinful condition and their need for salvation. Jesus gave to each of them the same offer of relationship with God. The invitation was not restricted to persons of a social, racial, economic level, or religious group. It was extended to all.

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- Do you think all three of these individuals would be welcome in your church? Why or why not?
- Sometimes people avoid coming to church because they feel that they are too sinful and their lives do not measure up to God's standards. They believe that church is a place for those whose lives are holy and good, not for people like them. How would you talk to such a person?

The Insurmountable Obstacle

Although Nicodemus was a respected religious teacher in Palestine, he had missed an important truth. Like many Jewish leaders he had substituted a life of doing good works for God for the one thing God is really looking for: faith in Him. The Jewish leaders thought they had to do good works and to keep the whole law of God in order to please God. Many people today have the same idea. They believe that those who live a good life will merit heaven, while those who do not will be sent to hell.

Many works of art graphically depict this view. In a monastery in Voronezh, Romania, there is a fresco on the wall depicting the final judgment. In this fresco a naked soul is shown being weighed on a scale. If the bag containing his good works is not heavy enough, he will tumble off the scale into the fires of hell, which are depicted at the bottom of the fresco. Many people go through life with this belief, hoping that in the end their good works will outweigh the bad and God will allow them into heaven.

Another picture in a church at Suceava, Romania, depicts a man climbing a ladder up to heaven. Each of the rungs of this ladder represents a different virtue, such as patience, kindness, self-control, compassion. If he misses even one of these rungs, he will slip from the ladder and fail in his quest to attain heaven.

These works of art conceptualize the widespread notion that salvation ultimately rests upon one's own efforts. Is this the view taught in the Bible? Is it possible for any human being to balance the scales with good works?

From its opening pages the Bible teaches us that there is an insurmountable obstacle standing in the way of salvation: the problem of sin. While God created a perfect world and set man and woman within it to serve as viceroys and stewards over creation, they chose a path of disobedience and rebellion against God (Gen 1-3).

Sin, the Insurmountable Obstacle



The fall of the first man and woman had sweeping consequences. Human beings became subject to both physical and spiritual death (Rom 5:12-21).



Read Romans 3:9-18, 23. What do you learn about the human condition from God's point of view?

We human beings are born with a perverse inclination to go our own way, to live our lives independently of God. From these and many other passages we learn that the problem of sin is not a small one that God could simply overlook. We often tend to excuse ourselves for sin in our lives. You may have heard someone excuse himself by saying, "Well, no one's perfect." God takes a far more serious view of sin than we do.

The Bible describes our sinful condition using terms such as "wickedness," "vileness," "filthiness," and "rebellion against God."³ Ultimately, sin is rebellion against our sovereign Creator and Lord and an affront to His holiness. A God who is absolute holiness cannot look upon sin.

Thus, our sinful condition presents an insurmountable obstacle for every human being, an obstacle that stands between God and us. Our sin has created a vast separation between Him and us. We are alienated from Him.

In the book of Romans Paul speaks of us as being enemies of God. While some may think it unfair of God to blame us for Adam and Eve's choice, the Bible makes it clear that not only are we born with a sin nature, we actively choose to sin and to live our lives independently from God.

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Can we overcome the obstacle that separates us from God by our good works?

Romans 3:27-28 indicates that no one will be justified (declared righteous before God) on the basis of good works (obeying the law).

Understanding Our Need for Salvation

We might compare our attempts to please God by our good works to attempts to swim across the ocean. A weak swimmer may be able to swim a few meters. A strong, well-trained swimmer may be able to swim a great distance, but compared to the vast expanse of the ocean, even this distance is nothing. Even the strongest swimmer will eventually succumb to fatigue and sink beneath the waves. So it is with us, when it comes to pleasing God by our good works. We are woefully inadequate and weak, without even the slightest chance of attaining heaven by our own efforts.

In order for us to respond to the gift of salvation, we must be aware of our need for it. An example makes this clear. Imagine you are sitting at home, and a friend hands you a life jacket. You would probably laugh and toss it aside. Now imagine you are in a boat at sea, the boat is rapidly filling with water, and your friend hands you a life jacket. As your boat is sinking, you would take the life jacket with a passion that was unknown to you as you sat in your living room and contemplated the same life jacket.

Once we understand how great the obstacle is which separates us from God and how desperate our situation is, we will gladly lift our hands to the One offering us rescue.

God’s Provision for Our Salvation

God in His mercy has not left us without a life jacket. Before the foundation of the world God had a plan to save us. His plan involved sending a worthy substitute to take the punishment for our sin, so that we might be reconciled to God.

The cross of Christ. The crux of salvation is in the cross of Christ, where God performed the focal act of salvation. God extended His mercy and grace to us by sending His own Son to die for our sins. Jesus died as a substitute for us. As Christ hung on the cross, He took the weight of the sins of the world upon Himself, taking the penalty of our sin and paying a debt we could not pay.



Read the following passages and respond to the questions that follow: Isaiah 53:1-9, 2 Corinthians 5:21, Colossians 2:13-14, and 1 Peter 2:24-25:

1. Why was Jesus crucified?
2. From the Isaiah passage note the details of Christ’s death.
3. What did the crucifixion accomplish?

This act of God on our behalf was predicted hundreds of years before Christ. The Prophet Isaiah wrote of One who would come as a suffering servant, indicating that God’s plan to send a Savior to bear our punishment was fulfilled in Christ (Isa 53:1-9).

Some refer to 2 Corinthians 5:21 as containing the “exchanged life” principle. An exchange took place at the cross of Christ. Christ actually became

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sin for me, and I actually become the righteousness of Christ. The one who accepts Christ's sacrifice for sin receives the righteousness of Christ as a free gift. What an amazing exchange!

Martin Luther was a sixteenth-century monk who spent his early life in a desperate struggle to please God by his own righteousness, painfully aware of his shortcomings. He spent hours in confession yet came away still carrying the weight of his guilt and inability to please a righteous God.

Then by God's mercy his eyes fell on the life-changing words "The righteous one will live by faith" (Rom 1:17). He realized that righteousness comes to us by faith, in which "we work nothing, we render nothing unto God, but only we receive and [allow] another to work in us."⁴ Luther was dramatically changed. The burden of struggling to earn his salvation was lifted from his shoulders.

The resurrection of Christ. The work of Christ for us on the cross would have no significance apart from the truth of His resurrection.



Read 1 Corinthians 15:12-23. What arguments does Paul make concerning the importance of believing in the resurrection of Christ?

Some argue that Jesus was merely a good man, a great moral teacher who died heroically but did not rise from the dead. To believe in such a person is worthless, Paul writes. A dead Christ would mean that we are still in our sins, for only one who rose from the dead can offer release from the power of sin and hope of eternal life. Only a resurrected Christ has any power to save.

The Basis of Our Salvation

**Salvation is by
God's grace alone
through faith alone
in Christ alone.**

The Christian life, then, is a life based on the living Christ. We are totally dependent on God for salvation. In order to be saved, I must depend on Christ, His sacrifice on the cross for my sin, and His resurrection that offers me eternal life. Salvation is by God's grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone (Titus 3:4-8).

The source of grace. Peter speaks of God as "the God of all grace" (1 Pet 5:10). From its opening pages the Bible reveals God to be a God of grace. We see His creation of a marvelous world out of nothing and His placement of His children in it to be recipients of His grace. In the garden of Eden Adam and Eve received many wonderful evidences of God's love and care for them. They did nothing to earn their place there or to earn God's love. God simply chose to be kind, loving, and good to them.

From the beginning we find that God showered His love and favor upon mankind. It is God’s nature to love and to show kindness and compassion. “The LORD longs to be gracious to you, and therefore He waits on high to have compassion on you” (Isa 30:18).

The meaning of grace. We may define grace as “undeserved blessing freely bestowed on man by God.”⁵ The word “favor” is often used in the Old Testament to convey the concept of grace. Philip Yancey has written, “Grace means there is nothing I can do to make God love me more, and nothing I can do to make God love me less.”⁶ God shows kindness and favor freely toward us who have done nothing to deserve it.

**God shows kindness
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An example of God’s grace. Perhaps few have understood God’s grace as clearly as the Apostle Paul. As a zealous Jewish religious leader named Saul, he had dedicated his life to extinguishing Christianity, believing that it threatened the truths found in the Jewish faith. He gave assent to the stoning of Stephen, the first martyr for Christ. His hatred of the followers of Christ was intense; in Acts 9:1 he is described as “breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord.”



Read the story of Saul’s conversion in Acts 9:1-19.

Do you see evidence here that Saul had done something worthy of salvation? On what basis did God save Saul?

In an amazing stroke of grace God reached down to touch Saul, and his life was dramatically turned around. Within a matter of minutes Saul, who had been spiritually blind, was physically blinded that his eyes might be opened to the truth—that this Jesus whom he had been persecuting was actually the Lord Himself. The Christ-hater was confronted with the living Christ, and his life was changed forever.

The cost of grace. While salvation is a free gift from God, it is not without cost. “Grace costs nothing for the recipients but everything for the giver . . . the exorbitant price of Calvary.”⁷

The only payment for sin which God would accept was the death of His own Son—the only One who lived a completely righteous life and whose death for mankind could therefore atone for our sin and provide our righteousness.



Read Romans 5:6-11 and 3:21-24.

1. How do verses 6-8 describe our condition as humans?
2. What was accomplished by the death of Christ, according to verses 9-10?
3. What makes it possible for us to be declared righteous before God?

The death of Christ made it possible for God to declare an unrighteous person righteous. God has made His perfect righteousness available to us, and these verses tell us that His provision of righteousness is “apart from the Law,” or the keeping of His perfect standard. His righteousness is offered to us freely, as a gift, in the person of Jesus Christ. The one who trusts in Christ’s death on the cross for salvation is declared righteous before God. An old English hymn expressed this thought: “Nothing in my hand I bring. Simply to Thy cross I cling.”

The Uniqueness of Christianity

A biblical scholar tells of the time a group of theologians were discussing the questions, How is Christianity different from all other religions? Is there anything unique about Christianity? Many suggestions were offered, but none seemed satisfactory. At that point C. S. Lewis, a noted Christian author and apologist, walked into the room, and the men called him over to join the discussion. When told the questions, Lewis responded, “Oh, that’s easy. It’s grace.”⁸

Grace is indeed that which distinguishes Christianity from every other world religion. Every other religion puts us on a treadmill of performance. We are called to do something, to follow some laws or lists of instructions, in order to earn God’s love or favor or forgiveness or approval.

Someone has said, “Christianity is the only religion that guarantees heaven upfront.”⁹ Every other religion says, “Let’s see how you live first.” Christianity makes the claim that God offers mankind free, unconditional love and forgiveness and that we have only to receive it by faith. The Christian has nothing to offer to God and can only call out to Him for His mercy and grace.

That our salvation depends upon the grace of God ultimately brings glory to God in a way that nothing else can. We cannot claim to deserve, to merit, to be worthy of even one iota of our salvation.



Review this section and write your own definition of grace. What are some of the results of God’s grace in your life?

Receiving the Gift of Salvation

At the beginning of this lesson we asked the question, What is a Christian?



Bearing in mind your previous reading of John 3:1-18 and Romans 3:21-24, read and ponder John 1:1-12; 6:28-29, Romans 4:1-8, and Ephesians 2:1-10. Identify what seem to you to be key, repeated themes or concepts in these verses that might contribute to the answer to this question.

Believing in Jesus means to trust Him and His work, relying on the truth that His death and resurrection have paid the penalty of our sin. Such faith in Him takes away our guilt before God and restores us to an eternal relationship with God—all without our having to do anything except believe in Jesus Christ.

Faith consists not in **doing** something (good works) but in **believing in** someone: **trusting** in Christ and **depending** on the effectiveness of His death and resurrection to save us.

Christians are those who recognize their own sinfulness and inability to save themselves and who come to Christ to receive the free gift of salvation. Those who would become one of Christ's followers must believe that Jesus died on the cross for their sin and rose again, conquering sin and death and offering eternal life as a free gift to those who trust Him as Savior. This new life is not possible apart from trust in the death of Christ and His resurrection.

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A Christian is not a good person who is able to please God by good works but one who fully trusts the work of Christ for salvation. We need to see that we are incapable of pleasing God or producing our own salvation because of the serious nature of our sin and self-centeredness, which separate us from God. We need to come to God, believing that Jesus Christ died on the cross to rescue us from our sinful condition.

The simple step of belief in Jesus Christ as Savior is the act of response to God's grace that places us into the family of God. Our salvation is a gift of God that we do not deserve; it comes to us by God's grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. We need only to reach out our hand and receive the gift of Christ's righteousness.

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The New Testament makes it clear that the Christian life is a life that is available for those who realize their sinful condition and need of a Savior and believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who died to save them from their sins and rose again from the dead. There is no one so sinful as to be beyond the reach of God's love and grace.



Can you recall when you responded to God's offer of salvation? Explain what happened.



Take time now to thank God for His great love for you, for extending His grace to you, and for making you part of His family. Ask Him to make you aware of how you can make His name known to others who need to know Him.



Imagine you are talking with Robert, who was mentioned in the introduction, and you want to tell him in a simple way how to become a Christian. What would you say to him? (Identify Scriptures that support your answer, and be prepared to role-play this encounter.)

We have seen that God's love is extended to us, regardless of our position in society, our ethnic background, our race, or how greatly we have sinned.

What about Other Paths to God?

Many people believe that there are many paths to God. The important thing, according to those who hold this view, is that one is sincere in what one believes. Yet Jesus Himself taught that He was the way to the Father and that there is no other way (Jn 14:6). He also described Himself as the door by which we enter in order to be saved (Jn 10:9-10). Luke records Peter's defense upon his arrest and includes this striking statement about Jesus in Acts 4:12, "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved" (HCSB).

There is one name and one name only that is worthy to be called upon for salvation: the name of Jesus Christ. Some people find it unjust of God to require that all people come to Him through Jesus Christ, yet we see the great mercy and love

of God in His willingness to send His own Son to die for a sinful world and to provide a way for us to be reconciled to God.

Living the Christian Life

When believers respond in faith to God’s gracious gift of salvation, a process begins of fitting them for heaven, of making them more like Christ. **This process of growth in Christlike character is called sanctification.** It is the process of becoming more holy. Some of Christ’s followers in the early church were confused about this process. They quickly jumped to the conclusion that they must add some of their own good works to the work of Christ, either to obtain salvation or to keep it.

Continuing the Christian Life by Faith

As the disciples spread the good news of Jesus Christ, they encountered many who misunderstood the offer of salvation by grace. The Judaizers were a group of first-century Jews who at least outwardly accepted Jesus Christ as their Messiah yet who began to insist that non-Jewish converts needed to participate in some of the established Jewish rituals, such as circumcision, or to observe some of the Jewish laws in order to be saved. By adding some requirements to salvation by faith, the Judaizers were saying that faith in Christ alone was not enough. They added a stipulation: they said that there are things a believer must do in addition to believing in Christ in order to merit salvation.

Many Gentiles in Galatia accepted the teaching of the Judaizers, and many were confused about the role of good works and the keeping of the law. Paul wrote to the church at Galatia to address their false thinking in this area. He saw that the teaching of the Judaizers was in direct opposition to the message of Christianity. Paul reminded the Galatian believers that salvation is a gift of God to all who believe.

In Galatians 2:19 Paul tells the Galatians that the believer has died to the law. What does this mean? One author suggests that we have died to the law in two ways. First, we have died to the law as a requirement for attaining righteousness before God. Second, we have died to the curse and condemnation that resulted from our own inability to perfectly keep the law.¹⁰

In Galatians 2:20-21 Paul describes the way in which Christ produces His life in us. He writes, “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God.”

This new life is not to be lived by our best efforts. **It is to be lived by faith in Christ and dependence on Him.** It is a life in which we draw spiritual nourishment and strength from our relationship with Christ. Jesus not only gives us eternal life, but He produces His very life in us as we live the Christian life by dependence on Christ.

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Read Galatians 3:1-4. Paul reacts quite strongly in these verses, saying to the Galatians, “What has happened? How have you been bewitched?” He calls them “foolish.”

1. What was it that elicited this strong admonishment from Paul? According to verse 3, what error had the Galatians fallen into?
2. How does Paul say the Galatians received the Spirit, and how does he say they were to be made complete?
3. What conclusions can you draw from this?

Paul reminds them that they are to be made complete in the same way they received Christ—by responding to God in faith, not by doing good works. Note that the Galatian believers were already Christians, “having begun by the Spirit.” The issues at stake here were how the Christian life is to be lived and what role good works plays in completing salvation.

In Galatians 5:3 Paul further argues that anyone who wants to be declared righteous by keeping part of the law is under obligation to keep the whole law. A person who is determined to gain heaven by doing good works must live a perfect life, without even one sin. No one but Christ has ever been able to fulfill this requirement. Only Christ kept the law of God, and only Christ could offer the perfect sacrifice for sin.

Today many people are as confused as the Galatians were about this question. Over the centuries many Christians have fallen prey to this same thinking. They believe that, once they become a child of God, it is up to them to earn God’s continued favor and love by their good works. **The Christian life is often viewed as a mixture of God’s grace and personal performance. The result of this thinking is to put Christians on a treadmill of performance.** “We preach grace to the non-Christian and duty to the Christian.”¹¹

The result is that often we Christians live with the word “should” pointed at our heads like a gun. We labor under the view that we must measure up to God’s standard daily, which leaves us fearful and insecure. We may tend to view God as a hard

taskmaster. We never know when we have done enough good things to earn God’s love and approval. **We tend to live under a cloud of shame, sensing God’s disapproval or disappointment as we continually fall short of His standards.**

When we sin, we may feel ashamed to come to Him for forgiveness, imagining that He is shaking His head and thinking, “Not again!” We may imagine God will not really want to see our faces again, particularly when we find ourselves repeating some of the same sins over and over. Perhaps we feel that we cannot approach Him until we have cleaned ourselves up.

The truth is: we will never be in a position to clean ourselves up. “The great mistake made by most of the Lord’s people is in hoping to discover in themselves that which is to be found in Christ alone.”¹²

If we believe that we are saved by grace but we must earn God’s continued love and favor, we may tend to do good deeds and get involved in Christian activities with the goal of earning God’s love and maintaining our salvation. Thus, we believe that our salvation is by grace through faith but our sanctification, the process of becoming holy, must be accomplished by our own works. When we think like this, our Christian experience may feel overwhelmingly like duty.

Are believers under obligation to maintain their salvation or earn God’s love by appropriate good works? In many of his letters Paul teaches that our entire salvation is based on grace alone. We stand every day in this same grace that saved us (Rom 5:1-2).



Read Philippians 1:6 and Hebrews 7:23-25. What do these verses teach about completing the process of salvation?

In passages such as this we are reminded of our complete dependence on God for the entire process of salvation, from beginning to end. Not only was Christ’s death sufficient to obtain our salvation, Christ’s life is sufficient to maintain our salvation. As our perpetual mediator and intercessor Christ is standing before the Father twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, assuring that God ever sees us as completely covered in His righteousness.

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From beginning to end, the process of our salvation is accomplished by Christ. “One of the best kept secrets among Christians today is this: Jesus paid it all.”¹³ Christ not only purchased our ticket to heaven, He purchased our **complete**

forgiveness of sins, our righteous standing with the Father, our identity as God's children, our permanent place in the family of God.

John Newton, once a slave trader, was converted to Christ from a life of moral corruption. Later he penned the words of one of the most famous English hymns, "Amazing Grace," in which he writes of grace so powerful "it saved a wretch like me." Newton understood his helpless condition. In one line he writes, "'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home." Do we believe this, or do we believe that our own efforts to serve God and please Him will bring us safely home?

Earlier we described salvation as reaching out our hand to receive the gift of Christ's righteousness. Now we may describe sanctification as depending daily on Christ's righteousness.

So as we live the Christian life, we see that we live this life daily by looking to God and depending upon Him completely for our salvation and for our sanctification. Our acceptance by God and our standing with Him are based solely on the merit of Jesus Christ. Our solid foundation for the Christian life is Jesus Christ. All other ground is sinking sand.

Set Free to Serve

The realization that our daily relationship with God is based on the infinite merit of Christ, rather than on our own performance, sets us free to serve Christ out of motives of love and thankfulness. Ultimately, grace causes people to serve God with greater freedom and will change our lives like nothing else. Good works will be the natural result of living with this awareness of grace, as we desire to please the One who has lavished so much love on us.

Based on his clear understanding of God's grace, Paul urges all followers of Christ to give their entire lives to God (Rom 12:1-2). This act of worship is one which is a natural outflow of the Christian's response to God's grace.



How do faith, good works, and grace relate to living the Christian life?



Write down your thoughts on the following questions in your notebook.

- When you imagine God looking at you, what is the expression you imagine on His face? Do you have the sense that He is disappointed with you? Do you imagine Him frowning at you? Or do you see His eyes filled with pleasure and delight? Why do you think this?

- Do you find yourself tending to seek God’s favor based on your performance? For example, do you feel more “qualified” to enter His presence when you have read your Bible or done some kind or helpful act? Do you avoid talking to Him when you know you have sinned or have not done what you should? What is it that keeps you from coming to Him?
- Have you been living the Christian life on a treadmill of performance and struggling with guilt and shame over your failures? How has this lesson clarified your thinking about the role of God’s grace in living the Christian life? How does this affect your motivation in serving God?

As we begin to grasp the magnificent scope of God’s grace in our lives, our response is one of thankfulness and worship.



Pause and spend a few minutes praising God for what He has done for you. Reflect on His grace extended to you and how you want to respond to that grace.

Concluding Thoughts

We become part of the family of God through a personal encounter with Jesus Christ, as we recognize our sinful condition that separates us from God and as we place our faith in the work of Christ on the cross for us. Our life in Christ rests on Him and His righteousness, which is completely transferred to us.

The process of our becoming more like Christ is also based on His righteousness, not ours. As Christians we continue to live by faith in Christ, depending on Him and drawing our spiritual nourishment and strength from our relationship with Him. He not only gives us eternal life but produces His very life in us. We are brought into God’s kingdom by grace; we are made holy by grace; and ultimately, we will be glorified by grace. It is no wonder that this message was quickly termed “the good news.”

ENDNOTES

¹ Most assume the Samaritans were a mixed race, which may have contributed to Jewish hatred of them.

² Jerry Bridges, *Transforming Grace* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1991), 27.

³ Gen 6:5, wickedness; Ps 12:8, vileness; Prov 30:12, filthiness; Deut 13:5, rebellion against God.

⁴ Martin Luther, *A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* (n.p., [1575]; reprint, London: James Clarke, 1953), 22.

⁵ Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, "Grace," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1984), 479.

⁶ Philip Yancey, *What's So Amazing About Grace?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 71.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁸ Related by philosophy professor Peter Kreeft at Calvin College, described in Scott Hoezee, *The Riddle of Grace: Applying Grace to the Christian Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 41-42.

⁹ Stephen Brown, *Key Life Tapes* (Key Biscayne, FL: Key Life Network, n.d).

¹⁰ Bridges, 109.

¹¹ Brown, *Tapes*.

¹² Arthur Pink, *The Doctrine of Sanctification* (Swengel, PA: Bible Truth Depot, 1955), 200, quoted in Bridges, 101.

¹³ Bridges, 19.