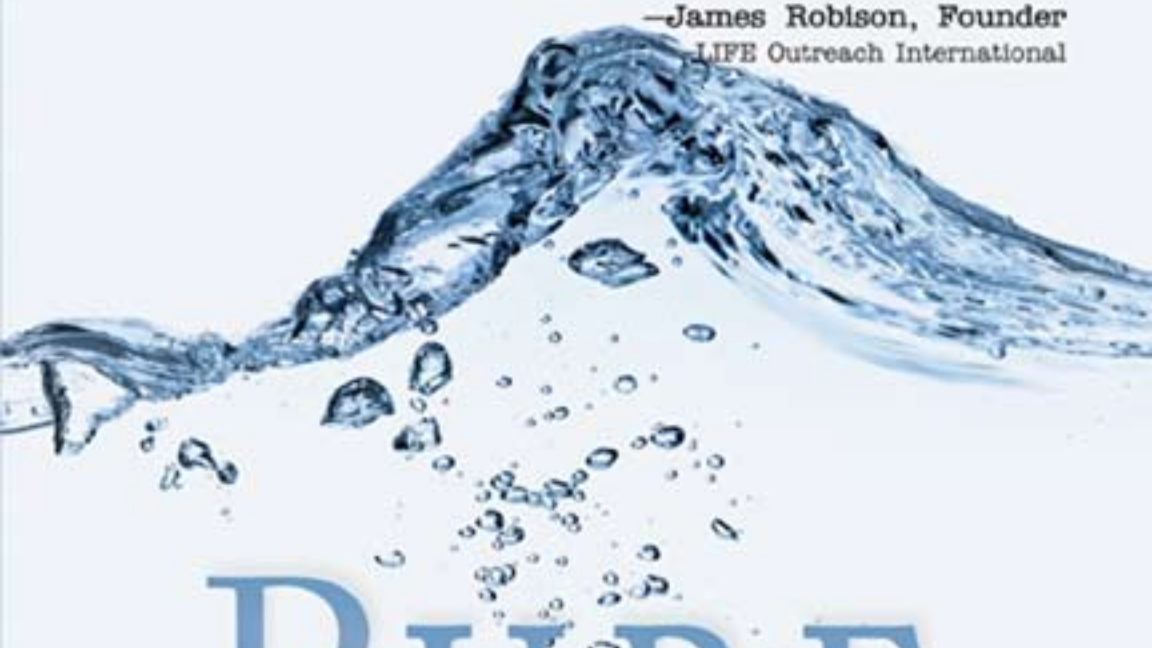
"Clark Whitten understands grace—a foreign concept among many believers today. Once we grasp the true meaning of grace, we'll live not as orphans, but as children of God."

—**James Robison, Founder**
LIFE Outreach International



PURE GRACE

The Life Changing Power of Uncontaminated Grace

Clark Whitten

Pure Grace

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Dedication

To Martha, my beloved wife and partner on the journey of discovering this great truth. Your life looks a lot like His to me.

To Grace Church, my family of faith, without whom this book might never have been. Your hunger for truth inspires me, and your unabashed support humbles me.

Acknowledgments

My first acknowledgment is to my friend, James Barron. Thank you, my dear brother, for all you have taught me about the finished work of Christ and for your relentless resistance to legalism in all its forms. You are a hero to all of us at Grace Church and to many more in the Body of Christ at large.

To my spiritual father, Jack Taylor. Thank you for your encouragement to write what you saw as an important addition to what has already been said. I love you, Pop!

To Don Milam at Destiny Image, thanks for taking a chance on a first-time author and for encouraging me to finish what I had begun.

To Mark and Amadita Stone, thank you seems inadequate for your generosity and unfailing support. Your help was more important than you know.

To all my ministry "buds" out there who challenged and encouraged me—David Smith, Robert Morris, Tom Lane, David Loveless, Wayne Drain, Jimmy Evans, Ed Ivie, Brady Boyd, Alan Chambers, Bo Williams, Dudley Hall, and James Robison.

Last but certainly not least, to my dear family who inspired me daily to put into print what they heard me say. Thank you, dear ones, for believing in me. Without you, there would be no Grace Church and probably no book! I love you beyond words—Martha, Wendy and Joey, Abby and Heath, John and Valli, Clark, Luke, John, and Shelby.

Endorsements

Pastor Clark Whitten writes from a depth of experience, strong scholarship and prophetic revelation about Grace. This book is simply profound. Clark looks at the profound implications of God's grace in a simple, down to earth way. These pages are both challenging and understandable. I don't know anyone who would say they truly understand the vastness of God's grace. Clark gets as close as I've seen.

E. Wayne Drain
Senior Pastor, Fellowship of Christians

Nothing has transformed every part of who I am and what I do like grace. One man has helped me understand it in a way that has made a profound difference altering the course of my life, my walk with Christ and my ministry: Clark Whitten. Everything he has taught me over the last 16 years is now in this incredible book, *Pure Grace*. I'm begging

you to read it, apply it and live it. It will make all the difference in the world. To say that I recommend it is the understatement of the century.

Alan Chambers
President, Exodus International

Years ago I heard Clark Whitten preach on grace and I knew that he was a man in the grip of one great truth. His call to "pure" grace is a refreshing and much-needed immersion in a healing stream. Grace unalloyed by all that legalists might wish to add to it, grace as pure as the very nature of God, that's the grace I need and that's Whitten's message.

Dr. Mark Rutland
President, Oral Roberts University

The first time I heard Clark teach on grace, everything within me thought, "This is too good to be true!" But it is true! And receiving the truth about grace has produced more love, joy, peace, righteousness, and faith in my life than anything else. The greatest burden I carry as a pastor and an author is to help people understand how good grace really is. Clark Whitten is the best teacher I have ever heard on the subject of 'Pure Grace.' This is truly a book that will change your life, guaranteed!

Robert Morris
Senior Pastor, Gateway Church - Southlake, Texas
Author of *The Blessed Life*

Clark Whitten understands grace—a foreign concept among many believers today. Grace is not works, but it certainly works the very life and transforming power of God into our lives. The church

needs to recognize the need to walk in this power. Once we grasp the true meaning of grace, we'll live not as orphans, but as children of God.

James Robison
Founder, LIFE Outreach International
Fort Worth, Texas

If you're like me, there are few things I can remember that people said more than 20 years ago, unless it was life defining. But more than 20 years ago, while listening to Clark Whitten teach on grace he said these words: "Most people know how to be 'good DOERS' but few people have learned to be 'good RECEIVERS.'" Those words punctured my performance driven heart, and became a divine magnet that God has used to 'draw' me to Himself in life-changing ways. When I heard that Clark was putting in writing the biblical grace concepts that I've heard him share, and watched him live, I was extremely excited for you, the reader. If you need a fresh drink of living water from a very deep well that will last beyond a lifetime, then read this book. As you learn to DO LESS and RECEIVE MORE, few things will revolutionize you more.

David Loveless
Lead Pastor, Discovery Church
Orlando, Florida

Clark Whitten has taught me more about grace than any other person. I was sitting in a crowd listening to him at a men's retreat in Colorado when God wrecked my heart. I hope this book does the same for you.

Brady Boyd
Pastor, New Life Church
Author of *Fear No Evil*

One of the greatest gifts God has ever given to me is my friendship with Clark Whitten. Without a doubt, he is the greatest authority on the subject of grace I know. Over the past 28 years of our friendship I have heard Clark preach many sermons on grace. It has set me free and allowed me to understand and experience God in new and greater ways. *Pure Grace* is one of the best books I have ever read. I couldn't put it down! Reading this book will change your life. You will never be the same.

Jimmy Evans
Founder and CEO, Marriage Today
Senior Pastor, Trinity Fellowship Church

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Introduction

"Grace is too good to be true! And if it *is* true, why haven't we heard about it before now? Why hasn't what you teach been taught to us by our pastors and theologians? What you teach intrigues me, but it cannot be that good or that easy! Doesn't God care about how we act?"

These are fairly typical responses from a believer who has attended an Evangelical Christian church for many years when confronted with the truth about the finished work of Christ. It *does* seem too good to be true. But it *is* true! Liberty, freedom, joy, spiritual passion, hope, and a host of other benefits are produced by a revelation of grace. If spiritual revival—renewal of spiritual life—is something to be desired, then an understanding of grace is the answer.

Some statements and concepts you will read in this humble attempt to explain the near unexplainable may shock your religious sensibilities, but please hear me out. I have been teaching and learning this stuff for more than two decades, and it has dramatically changed my life and the lives of those around me. Grace is the gateway to our becoming fruitful, mature, and joyous disciples. Being a child of God is fun and exciting again! Remember?

I became a believer at 20 years of age—rather dramatically, without benefit of having been raised in church. I felt an incredible joy and sense of belonging, acceptance, and love from my new heavenly Father. My relationship with Him was simple and emotionally overwhelming. Witnessing to my friends and family about Christ was natural, exciting, and very effective. I loved God and He loved me. There was no sense at all of having to justify His love by doing anything. Kind of like Adam and Eve before the Fall, huh? They just were who they were created to be. They were human beings in intimate relationship with this incredible God. That is how I felt.

Until…I began attending church and being taught by people who were in bondage to a lie. They didn't know it and neither did I. It wasn't their fault, and I don't hold any grudges; they were doing the best they could with the revelation they had, and their motives were pure.

However, the impact of their legalism and performance model of Christianity was devastating. My fresh new joy and enthusiasm began to be replaced by guilt and a focus on being a "good boy" for God. I noticed a growing sense of alienation from my heavenly Father and my prayer life changed from adoration and wonder to a series of sterile "I'm sorries" for being a bad boy.

Along the way throughout the years came a number of achievements that others admired and about which I was proud—but there was a lingering sense I did them mostly on my own. Honestly, my family, my church, and my friends all paid a price for the lie I had believed. The Clark who Jesus died to redeem, the Clark I was created to be, was locked up in a prison of lies. My personality, my gifting, and my destiny were all a shadow of that newly emerging, life-filled, joyous spiritual babe who intuitively got it right for a while.

Today I feel like I have come full circle! I love God and He loves me! As Paul said, I have recaptured the simplicity of my devotion to Christ. You will too, when you see it. I'm certain. You were made for this stuff! It makes sense for the one who gets it. It has the power to infuse you with hope that you can become like Jesus here on earth. While that is not a goal to be achieved, it is certainly a promise to be received. When you see it, you will see it. I hope you will look so you can see.

Conscious and Unconscious

OK. Allow me to make a few statements that should pique your curiosity, then we will get to the teaching.

1. Christians are way too conscious of sin and way too unconscious of God's grace. Listen, Jesus did not die to modify your behavior! He could have achieved behavior modification in any number of ways that wouldn't have cost Him His life. Jesus went to the cross taking the sins of the world upon Himself. All of yours and mine were included! All of them—past, present, and future. We stand before God's throne of grace sinless. That has to be true, or we don't stand there at all. Interested in exploring that? We will.

2. Christians are not required to confess their sins to God in order to be forgiven, we already are forgiven. With the exception of First John 1:9, there is no biblical basis for a believer to confess sins to God for forgiveness. To each other for healing, yes; but not to God for forgiveness. How much time will that free up!

3. Legalistic Christianity is in the sin management business full-time and failing miserably at the job. While sin management may be lucrative, it is entirely ineffective. Sin cannot be managed. Still, the Church continues to employ this model of ministry.

4. I believe that New Testament repentance is not the Holy Spirit convicting of sin, me feeling sorry, confessing the sin, asking for forgiveness, and committing to stop doing it. That typical scenario is a grotesque misrepresentation of the gift of repentance. It is heathenish! What is God really asking of me if He asks me to repent? We will see.

5. Contrary to popular religious opinion, God is not angry toward me and never will be. Not in the least. He was angry, but no longer. All of His anger—sense of violation because of sin—was poured out and extinguished on His dear Son. He is not going to "get me" because I have sinned. He "got" Jesus for my sin! My bad works don't move God any more than my good works move Him. He simply isn't moved by "works" of any kind. If you are motivated to do a great work for God, good luck!

6. "Do good, God is glad; do bad, God is mad" is the M.O. of legalistic Christianity. I curry favor with God by good works and incur His displeasure by sinning. Honestly, what does that sound like? Islam? Buddhism?

African fetish worship? It is utterly heathenish and deadly wrong. If you can't take it that far, at least agree it is foolish. Galatians 3:1-3 makes that clear:

You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

7. Sin, for the Christian, is a violation of friendship—relationship—not a violation of the law. Christians are not under the jurisdiction of the Old Testament law. Many believe and teach grace without law is a pathway to sinful behavior. They see grace and law as "balance." The Apostle Paul saw it as "mixture." I have heard some refer to New Testament grace as "greasy grace." That term offends me at a level I cannot describe! The truth is, anyone who clings to this "mixture theory of grace and law" doesn't trust the power of love to transform lives. They don't see that the power of relationship and intimacy with God can be trusted to transform a human being. God can be trusted! Paul said that a little leaven leavens the whole lump. He was referring to a little law leavening the whole lump of grace. What most of us have been taught about what God is like and what He desires from us simply is not true. It is much harder to sin against love than law.
8. Many think and teach that while sin doesn't destroy my relationship with God as a believer, it does damage my fellowship with God implying God punishes or disciplines

me for sin by withdrawing His fellowship. Some mental gymnastics are required to arrive at this conclusion, but keeping people under the thumb of God is necessary to make them behave and, after all, behavior control is the goal. The threat of God withholding fellowship while remaining in relationship is another non-biblical concept. It is a lie. Show me where the New Testament even hints at such a thing. The opposite is true.

Listen, *everything changed in the New Covenant!* We are seated together with Christ in heavenly places now—no withdrawing of fellowship as a means of punishment. I am convinced, Paul says, nothing can separate me from the love of God (see Rom. 8:39). You may have thought what you did separated you from God's love, but it did not. *Nothing* can separate us from His love.

9. Christians are truly free. We are free to laugh or cry, read a novel or the Bible, eat meat offered to idols or avoid it, drink wine or water, smoke or chew, get fat or fit, attend church or stay at home, tithe or give nothing—all without condemnation from God. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ (see Rom. 8:1) doesn't mean no consequences or loss, but does mean no condemnation.

God has the power to change my "wanter." As that happens, I get to do what I want! My brother spent several years in jail, and he said the worst part of that experience was never getting to do what he wanted. Doesn't that sound like our spiritual jails? Look, I'm not minimizing the impact of sin, but I am confident in the power of love to change us from the inside out. Paul said we were not to use our liberty as an occasion for the flesh, but we all do at times. Our liberty

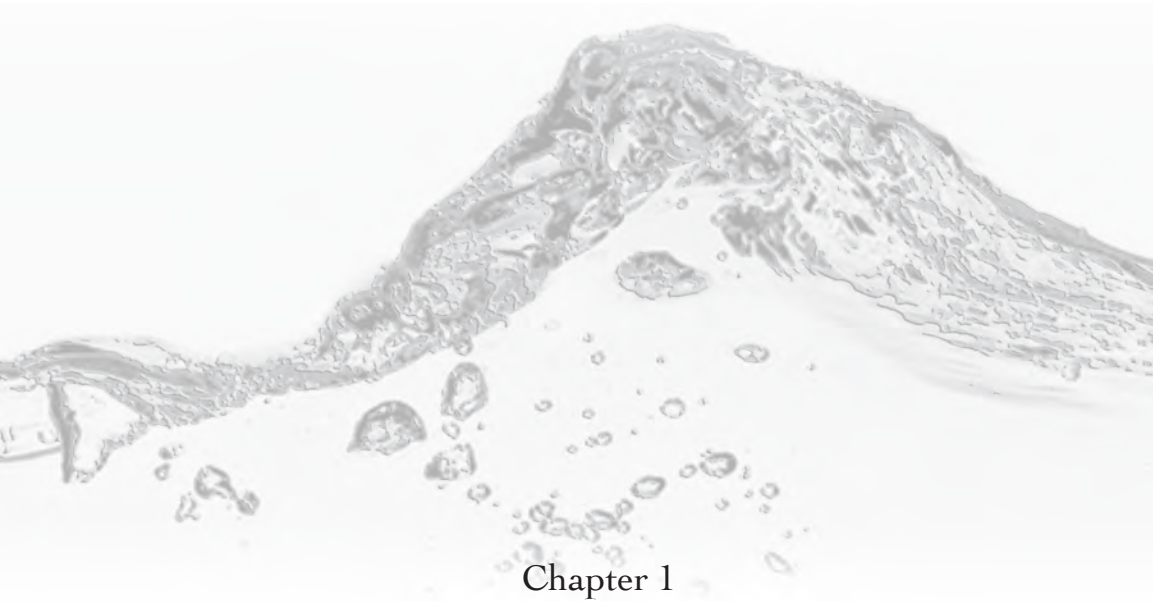
isn't negated by our sin any more than it was procured by our good behavior. Only free people can become more free! Legalists have no chance of standing in liberty. They have none to begin with.

Before we move on to the teaching, I have an idea I want to float by you. I believe the Body of Christ is on the threshold of a new reformation that will impact the world beyond what the Protestant Reformation accomplished. Luther and Calvin got it right concerning justification by faith, and that resurrected truth revolutionized the Church and the world. However, they didn't get it right concerning sanctification. Their approach sounds familiar: One is saved by grace through faith (justified) but made perfect (sanctified) by human effort through law-keeping.

Saved by grace, perfected by the flesh. Little has changed in 500 years! The Church still employs that same strategy and deeply believes it is biblical truth. The rules may have changed some, but the approach is the same. When the Church gets the revelation that we are sanctified—actually it has already happened—by the same process as justification, grace through faith, a reformation that will again change the world is at hand. It is already beginning here and there and will become a tsunami of joy and spiritual passion as more and more believers begin to free themselves of legalism. The religious establishment will, by and large, resist with gnashing of teeth, but the inevitable move of God characterized by grace is on the way.

Get ready! This reformation will reveal the Father and His great love for His children. Evangelism will change, fellowship between us will deepen and be much more meaningful, and aggressive love will sweep millions into the Kingdom. The Gospel will once again become truly Good News! There is a party being hosted by our heavenly Father in honor of those of us who have come to our senses in the pig pen of legalism and decided to come home to be with Him.

There is an engraved invitation with your name on it. I sincerely pray you might lay down whatever defenses you have and open your heart to the revelation of *pure grace.*



Chapter 1

A Grace Reformation

A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough.
—Galatians 5:9

Little has changed in the Protestant church in more than 500 years. Some of the rules have been modified and adapted to present culture, some methods and strategies of conducting church have changed slightly; but in reality, our core approach to reaching and discipling people is the same as it was 500 years ago.

Martin Luther and John Calvin, the primary leaders of the Protestant Reformation, got it right concerning justification, or how one is saved. *"The righteous man shall live by faith"* (Gal. 3:11) was the revelation Luther discovered and he and Calvin preached. In their break

with Catholicism, they correctly saw that no one is saved or justified by rule-keeping, church attendance, or adherence to external behavioral demands. Salvation is by grace through faith. They got it right, and that Holy Spirit-inspired revelation changed the world.

But they missed it on sanctification, or how one is perfected into the likeness of Christ. Luther and Calvin both drew up rigid rules of conduct in their churches. Calvin, for example, had a catalogue of austere rules of morality including bans on swearing, gambling, and fornication. He forbade dancing even at weddings. Unexcused absences from worship services were severely penalized. Adultery and homosexuality could draw severe sentences, even death. (Notice there were no rules against alcohol consumption. I wonder if it had to do with the fact that Luther had a little drinking problem? Just a thought.)

It has been long rumored that Luther's view of Christians was that we are piles of dung covered with snow! If he actually said this, I think he had a very low view of the miracle of the new birth and would agree with modern religious thinking that Christians are simply sinners saved by grace—an unbiblical but widely held view of salvation. This is the kind of legalistic leaven that has leavened the modern Church's doctrine and caused Christians to have a low view of salvation themselves with tragic results.

If you are a sinner, you have not been saved by grace! If you have been saved by grace, you are not a sinner! We will cover this topic more thoroughly in a later chapter as we consider the implications of righteousness, but allow me to be a bit repetitive because of the importance of this subject. If you have been "saved by grace," you were a sinner—but now you are something else entirely!

Paul addresses Christians as saints in many of his letters, and never uses the term "sinner" to identify believers. We are talking

about a state of being, not an act or an action when we use the term "sinner." We were born with a sin nature, and that is precisely why we had to be born again. My new nature is not a sin nature but a sinless nature! I can sin, but I am not a sinner. All of us are either in Adam (with a sin nature) or in Christ (with a sinless nature). There are no other categories! *A state of being!* Saints or sinners. Saints can sin, but that sin does not undo the work of Christ and make a saint a sinner. A sinner can do good works, but good works do not make a sinner a saint. See?

Here is the approach Luther and Calvin took. One is saved by grace through faith, but then for the rest of our earthly lives we must try our best to modify our behavior to please God and release His blessing in our lives. To be pleasing to God or "right" with God depends on my behavior—do my best to keep the rules here and hang on until I get to Heaven—then I will be fully sanctified.

Oh, by the way, many of the rules are not even closely related to Scripture, which is the M.O. of legalism. As I said in the beginning of the chapter, little has changed in the Protestant church in 500 years! Walk into almost any Protestant church and you will soon hear a mixture of law and grace taught and received with great enthusiasm, agreement, and amens all around! It doesn't matter what flavor of church: Evangelical, Charismatic, Pentecostal, denominational, nondenominational, Reformed or Free Will, seeker-sensitive, fundamental, or liberal. At the end of the day, almost all are presenting a version of the Gospel leavened with the law.

The leaven of the law is found in even the most gracious presentation of the Gospel:

- Get saved by grace through faith, then act right and try hard to be like Jesus because the world is watching, and

you must not let them see you sin. Help out God in His mission to rid the earth of sin. Oh, by the way, we will help you with your list of rules so you won't be confused about what is required of you. Do these things and you might even get blessed by this capricious God we serve.

- You must die daily to accomplish all God wants of you and serve Him fervently and thus prove to be a good disciple. Stop sinning and be good. After all Jesus has done for you, it is a small thing to ask. When you are bad, come to the altar and get right with God. He will forgive you again and might even bless you if you will get serious about changing. Set your will to do what is right and thus glorify God. Confess your sin to God daily and pray for forgiveness so you can start the day clean. Stay up-to-date in your confession and repentance; and whatever you do, don't have too much fun!
- The Bible is a perfect rule book, so read it daily for instruction on how to act. The Holy Spirit was given to you to empower you to act better and better and convict you of your sin when you stray. God is pleased when you act right. When you don't, He will clean your clock! Fear God and keep His commandments. Amen.
- Oh, I almost forgot, tell somebody this week about how to be saved and happy like we are!

Religion—not real Christianity—is and always has been in the behavior modification and sin management business. It is so lucrative and so firmly entrenched in the Church that it will take a second Great Reformation and a revelation of no less importance than Luther's to correct this great and spiritually murderous lie. What this "saved by grace but perfected by human effort" approach has done

is produce a Church that is judgmental, angry, hopeless, helpless, dependent, fearful, uninspired, ineffective, and perpetually spiritually immature. The only bright spot is the hope of Heaven, and even that isn't certain to the average Evangelical Christian. No wonder we haven't impacted our culture and have become a joke to most casual observers.

But that is not the most heartbreaking result of this religious lie. The most heartbreaking result is the personal devastation that comes when sincere, pure-hearted people attempt the impossible over and over again and are beaten and bloodied by their efforts to please God. I don't blame them for giving up, checking out, or playing the game. Failure gets old fast. Instead of correctly representing and displaying the great good news of the Gospel and the joy of our magnificent Savior, our lives, regardless of how sincere we are, simply do not correctly reflect Him when we are trapped in the lie of legalism. I hate what religious legalism is and has done to deflect His glory and enslave those Jesus died to set free. Religion has always been the greatest enemy of the true Gospel and the finished work of Christ.

Listen, *Jesus did not die to modify my behavior!* If behavior modification had been His ultimate purpose, He could have accomplished it in any number of ways short of sacrificing His life. Changing my behavior is a small thing to the Creator of the universe. *Jesus died to take the sins of the world upon Himself and redeem everyone who will believe.* Jesus died to transform people into children of God, to create something new and holy that can be in union with a Holy God. I am not waiting or working to be justified. I am already justified, and get this—I am already sanctified! Sanctification—having been made perfect—is a state of being, not a goal to be achieved or grow into. *"For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified"* (Heb. 10:14).

The old religious approach of "I *am* justified, I *am being* sanctified, and I *will be* glorified" is a lie. It is religious nonsense. Progressive sanctification is based on the theory that we can act better and better until we get to be almost like Jesus on earth, then be fully made perfect in Heaven. Listen, I believe that if you aren't made perfect now, you cannot be in union with God, and you won't go to Heaven! No unsanctified person or thing can live in God's presence. God will not do anything to me in Heaven that He hasn't already done here!

Let's look at what really happened to me when I was born again and what Jesus had to accomplish to bring me into union with my heavenly Father. It is not what most think, and it certainly is not what religion teaches. It is bigger, better, more far-reaching, and more permanent than most anyone believes. Grace is better than we think. The finished work of Christ is more complete than we have dared to dream.

A Radical Plan

What is salvation? Many would say it is getting me out of earth and into Heaven, but that is not salvation. It may be one result of salvation, but it is not salvation. Salvation is not getting me out of earth and into Heaven; *salvation is getting God out of Heaven and into me!* God had to prepare me for His presence. When I was saved, I became the temple of the Holy Spirit. I came into union with Christ, and I became a son of God. Now, friends, that took some doing on God's part! For Him to make me into something He could dwell in took a sacrifice beyond my comprehension but He did it! *It is finished! "Christ in you, the hope of glory,"* Paul says in Colossians 1:27.

What God had to do was radical. It was cataclysmic. He had to create something new. He had to create a new person who was a perfect dwelling place for His Spirit; and that is exactly what He did. He

did not redo the old or remodel or tweak me here and there. I had to become a "new creation!" I had to be "born again." I was dead in my sin and had to be raised to new life. My sin could not accompany me into God's presence, and because God's goal was union with me, He could not simply cover my sin as in the Old Covenant. He had to cleanse me of my sin. *"Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow"* (Isa. 1:18).

I could not be conformed, I had to be transformed. "Conform" comes from the Greek word *morph* or *morpha*. It means to "shape into" or take the substance that is and shape it or mold it into some other form, but the substance remains the same. "Transform" comes from the Greek words *meta morph* from which we get the English "metamorphosis." It means to be "changed over."[1] Not only is the form new, the substance is new also. Metamorphosis produces a new substance, a new thing, or a new being.

The old me could not be conformed to the likeness of Christ. All things must become new. That is precisely what Jesus accomplished in me, and in you if you are born again! All things new. I was dead in my sin but now I am alive in Christ. I was a slave, had no relationship with God, now I am a son—and if a son, an heir of God. I was a citizen of the kingdom of darkness, now I am a citizen of the Kingdom of God. I was born of the flesh but reborn of the Spirit. I was a stranger and an alien to God, now I draw close to Him and am already seated at His right hand with Christ. Radical change! Transformed! *"Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come"* (2 Cor. 5:17).

What I am talking about is a state of being, not a goal to be achieved. I *am* all these things, I'm not waiting to become them. It has to be this way. Our Holy God cannot, will not, allow sin in His presence. To be in His presence, I must be as sinless as Christ. Again, that is a state of

being that Christ accomplished in me. That is why I believe progressive sanctification is nonsense. It is a religious teaching to control behavior and manage sin. Legalists and religionists simply do not trust in the finished work of Christ and the efficacy of His blood to produce His intended result. Therefore, they feel compelled to help Him control the behavior of His new creations.

The apostle Paul came against the same insidious lie and addressed the problem in Galatians 3:1-3:

> *You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? This is the only thing I want to find out from you; did you receive the Spirit by works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?*

Paul calls the Galatian Christians foolish! It is foolishness to believe one is perfected in a manner other than the manner in which one is saved or justified. They were saved; they received the Spirit, by hearing with faith—and they are perfected, sanctified, the same way! He asks who bewitched them. Who lied to you about this? Who tricked you into believing this foolishness? The flesh cannot—ever—produce the level of perfection God requires to be in union with Him.

Legalism and its twin brother religion always appeal to the flesh. May I say both are deadly and always at cross purposes to life, liberty, and the pursuit of freedom, joy, godliness, holiness, Christ-likeness, spiritual maturity, and intimacy with God. If you have a desire to experience the abundant life Jesus died to give you and to truly reflect His glory to those around you, you must refuse and resist these two deadly enemies of truth and open your eyes to see the magnificent and completed work of Christ on your behalf. We must see and believe

who Christ has made us to be in order to live out this glorious life He not only modeled for us but empowers us to live.

Because He Is, I Am

I am justified! I am a son of God! I am an heir of God and a joint heir with Christ! I am cleansed of my sin! I am a new creature! I am righteous! I am holy and blameless! I am part of a royal priesthood and a holy nation! I am a living stone in His temple! I am His beloved Body and Bride! I am the repository of His Spirit! I am *sanctified!*

I am not hoping these things will happen, waiting for them to happen, working on them, praying for them, or seeking them. I am not attempting to achieve them even with God's help. I have stopped listening to those who deny my sanctification, and I am proudly proclaiming it. I admit to being deeply humbled by it and don't fully understand it; but I believe it, and it has changed my life. I am sanctified. I cannot add anything to the finished work of Christ and any attempt on my part to do so is foolishness of the highest degree and always ends in defeat. He did it.

I am sanctified.

If that is not true, everything in the Bible could be a lie. It simply has to be this way. Don't misunderstand me. I am not saying my flesh is sanctified. It is not. There is no good thing in my flesh. Please do not connect the two. Clark's flesh and Clark are not the same. My flesh has no power to accomplish any godly thing, and that is precisely why human performance and law-keeping always fail in attempts to be good enough. It cannot be good because it is not good. Our hope of becoming like Jesus is in our understanding that we already are like Him. We are sanctified.

I believe this truth has been a stumbling block to the Church and to individual Christians for centuries and has kept us mired in the mud of legalism and human effort. The finished work of Christ on our behalf is so good and so complete, we cannot allow ourselves to believe it! If the devil couldn't keep us from the revelation of being saved by grace through faith, and he obviously couldn't thanks to Luther, Calvin, and others, his fallback strategy was to limit the damage done by deceiving us about the completeness of Christ's work. His strategy was brilliant in its simplicity. He lied to us again about God—remember Eve. God loved us enough to save us, but now we are under obligation to be good so we can have His favor. Saved by grace, but perfected through the flesh has been the devil's strategy from the beginning!

Recently a man in our church said to me something like this, "You know, Pastor, I think we have been praying for the wrong thing for years. We have prayed for spiritual revival and what we had in mind is not what God wants. Revival to us is rededicated flesh and a renewed commitment to doing good things for God. You know, acting better and doing more. I don't think that is real revival."

I believe Bill was right. I asked him if what he was presently experiencing felt like revival, renewal of life, and he said, "Absolutely"!

"What brought it about?" I asked.

He replied, "A growing understanding of grace and the completed work of Christ. I am seeing truth, and it is changing my life."

Grace produces perpetual spiritual life and vitality and moves us toward spiritual maturity. Legalism and religion produce perpetual spiritual immaturity—the immature look for authority figures to tell them what to do. Immature authority figures make rules that benefit themselves or their institutions and secure their power and control. It is like leaving a 5-year-old in charge of a 2-year-old!

While I may be exaggerating a bit, this scenario sounds like today's Church to me, and I have extensive experience in church! Just like immature children, we want to know the rules primarily to see what we can get away with. What can I get away with and still be in God's good graces. There is little awe and wonder at the magnificence of God, and we are reduced to trying as best we can to get by until we get to Heaven.

A Revelation of Grace

I believe that the most-asked question by Christians of their leaders is, "What is God's will?" Isn't that so? There is little confidence in average Christians in their ability or worthiness to hear God for themselves. Dependent and immature. I repeat, the Church is immature and has been for most of its existence. The reason is simply the inability to see the revelation of grace and the finished work of Christ. If the goal is managing sin and keeping it under control, it seems to me we have been failing miserably. Please, let's give ourselves the chance to break out of the religious performance prison and grow up in freedom and liberty.

The more mature one is, the less need for rules. Paul says:

> *Until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children…* (Ephesians 4:13-14).

A revelation of grace allows us to mature and motivates us to become someone who is like Jesus. With our focus on behavior and sin management, we cannot eat anything but milk, and thus the nurseries are full of cute but howling babies who cannot feed themselves. After a while, we

get on each other's nerves and begin fussing and fighting and making a mess. This scenario sounds like church to me most of the time!

Roy Hessian, a great author and preacher, once asked me, "Little brother, when you preach, do you give the people good advice or good news?" Before I could reply, he continued, "Good advice is not bad, but it won't change their lives. What they need is good news. Even when you are preaching good advice, always end it with good news." That statement began changing the way I taught the Word of God! Good advice is for babies; good news grows them up! The Gospel isn't simply a message of how to be saved, the Gospel is the good news of the finished work of Christ! I am determined to teach all of it, believe all of it, experience all of it, receive all of it, and allow it to transform me into the image of Christ.

Honestly, I think many of us pastors fear our people "growing up"; because if they do, we may not be able to control them! They might develop minds of their own. They might begin questioning the religious drivel and spiritual milk they are being asked to eat each week. The constant rehashing of the same old behaviors—be good boys and girls, do some good works so God will bless, learn to manage your sin, don't tick the Big Guy off—claptrap. Come on, before you throw me under the bus, listen to what is being taught out there in church-land. Are you really listening to this stuff? Most of it is a mixture of law and grace at best. Some of it is just downright religious garbage, but starving folks will eat almost anything.

Now before you jump on pastors, realize that it is really your own fault that some are preaching this message. You end up getting what you want, and milk is what many want. OK, enough of the soapbox. Suffice it to say, legalism in all its forms leads to spiritual immaturity; but a revelation of grace and the finished work of Christ inevitably

leads to spiritual maturity and the stature that belongs to the fullness of Christ.

I don't know about you, but I am desperate to see the church grow up and become the world-changing, gates-of-hell-demolishing, love-God-with-all-her-heart entity that Jesus said He was building. That is exactly what grace produces. Allow me to repeat myself, *I am sanctified,* and so are you if you are born again—whether you believe it or not!

Endnote

1. Conform and transform; http://www.merriam-webstercom/dictionary; accessed August 1, 2011.

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