

Sermon – Grow In Grace

"Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me..." So begins one of the most beloved hymns of all times, a staple in the hymnals of many Christian denominations.

But just what is Grace? How does one *grow* in Grace? Every Christian talks about grace – they sing songs about grace – but few can really explain what it is. The Bible tells us "...*by grace are you saved*" (Ephesians 2, verses 5,8), so isn't it about time we really understood more about this thing called Grace?

Those of you with a history in the Churches of God know that the subject of grace was traditionally avoided. Not only was it not preached about, it was seldom even spoken about by members. This was not because Grace isn't in the Bible or that Grace is a bad thing. It was because Grace has historically been a subject that has been misunderstood, misrepresented and perverted by the Christian community at large – and this began shortly after the beginning of the Church in the first century! It continues today. We call it "cheap grace".

Actually, the groundwork for this twisting of the true meaning of Grace began some 600 years before Jesus founded His Church, as we will show in this sermon.

So during our time together today, we will be studying the concept of Grace – what it is, what it isn't and in particular, how do we grow in it.

2 Peter 3:18, *But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.*

We see here that grace is something we can grow in. This is very important to know, because it will help us to understand what grace really is and how it's meaning has been twisted.

Grace is important – it is how we are saved – and we are told to grow in it, so let's begin by examining the English word Grace. This is the word used many times by the King James translators, and it is essentially 1500 AD English. But when Paul wrote these words, he did not use the 1500 AD word "grace", but the Greek word "charis" [cáre-iss]. We are saved by this charis.

This is the same root word from which we get our modern English words *charisma* or *charismatic*. Looking this up in a Bible lexicon we find *charis* is one of those words that have multiple meanings.

Charis: *good will, loving-kindness, favor, a gift of grace, benefit or bounty, the spiritual condition of one governed by the power of divine grace, but the best one is the merciful kindness by which God, exerting his holy influence upon souls, turns them to Christ, keeps, strengthens, increases them in Christian faith, knowledge, affection, and kindles them to the exercise of the Christian virtues.*

While this gives us at least an understanding of the Greek word originally used, it does not really give us a clear understanding of how grace functions in a Christian's life.

But before we talk about what grace is, I would first like to talk about what grace is not.

What Grace Is Not

As I mentioned in the introduction, the meaning of grace has become perverted and twisted. This is not by accident but by design. Since grace is an essential of our salvation, the god of this world, “the king of confusion”, would certainly be in muddying up the waters, so to speak.

The activities of Satan to pervert the true meaning of grace did not begin with the establishment of the Church in 30 AD, but rather began as I mentioned earlier, some 6 centuries before. I came to an understanding of this satanic plot after reading the book *Primitive Christianity in Crisis* by author and historian Alan Knight. My family and I met Alan at the Feast of Tabernacles in 2000 and have since become good friends with him. Alan visited our little congregation in Colorado several times in our early days, as he had been on a work assignment back then that had him living in Colorado.

We were introduced to Alan by our good friend and fellow minister Peter Kamen. Peter had known Alan many years ago – back in the Worldwide Church of God. Peter saw an ad for this book in the Journal and discovered that he knew the author. After reading the book, Peter was inspired to present a wonderful sermon on growing in grace and knowledge. In it, he encouraged his fellow ministers to cover the subject of grace. And that’s why I’m speaking on this subject today with thanks to Peter and Alan for paving the way.

Let’s turn to the book of **Jude**. In many ways, the book of Jude parallels 2 Peter. We see here that Satan was already busy perverting the true faith.

Jude 1:1-3 (KJV) Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, *and* called: Mercy unto you, and peace, and love, be multiplied. Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort *you* that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.

We see here, very shortly after the founding of the New Testament Church, that Jude exhorts those early Christians to contend for the faith once delivered. It should be clear to us that Jude knew something was wrong – something had changed! But notice verse 4.

Verse 4, *For there are certain men crept in unawares [unnoticed], who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.*

These men were *before of old* commissioned as it were to pervert grace into *lasciviousness* which is unbridled lust, excess, or licentiousness – license to sin! This was planned, as I said earlier, almost 600 years before Christ! We’ll see how this was done as we continue in the message.

Alan Knight’s book, *Primitive Christianity in Crisis*, covers this very thing. Alan is a member of the Church of God, 7th Day, and what he means by “**Primitive Christianity**” is Christianity that has not changed in practice since the very early New Testament times - Sabbatarian Christianity.

Mainstream Christianity also uses this term to describe the Churches of God, but they mean the term in a derogatory way, as in “crude” or “simple”. But the primary meaning of *primitive* is “*relating to, denoting, or preserving the character of an early stage in the evolutionary or historical development of something.*”

What Alan points out is that around the 6th century BC – the time that the Messianic Prophecies were being given to men like Isaiah, a culture known as “Hellenism” had taken root in the Greek and Roman world of that time. Now Hellenism is not a religion of belief system, but rather a philosophical culture that provided a fertile medium in which other belief systems took root and

began to grow. For example, the philosophies of Plato and Socrates came out of this culture, as well as **gnosticism** [pronounced “nah·sti·siz·em”], which is the heresy that sprang up in the early New Testament Church.

The Greek root word of gnosticism is *gnosis* [“no·sis”] and means *knowledge*. They felt that having special knowledge was Gnostics [“nah·sticks”] considered the principal element of salvation to be direct knowledge of the supreme divinity in the form of mystical or esoteric insight. They emphasized personal spiritual knowledge above the orthodox teachings, traditions, and authority of the Church.

Now gnosticism consists of many different variations, just like modern day Christianity. But the flavor we’re going to talk about today had a strong belief against the importance of the physical or material world. What they taught was that the soul originated in heaven and at the time of one’s physical birth, that soul descended, passing through the planets, and entered into a physical body here on earth. During the life on earth, the spiritual portion of that person was to become perfected, and if perfection was achieved, the soul would pass again through the planets and back to heaven.

Now this sounds very close to what many mainstream Christians believe today, except maybe for the planet thing. This is actually the origin of the doctrine of the immortal soul – a doctrine that was not believed by the Jews, except for those who had come out of the Babylonian captivity and had been “Hellenized” in the process.

This is also the origin of modern astrology, for they believed that as the soul descended through the planets, the exact alignment and configuration of those planets and constellations would affect the life of that soul during its time on earth.

So we see that this Gnostic belief system had been established 6 centuries before Jesus began the Church and so by the first century AD, many of the new converts to Christianity had brought along their Gnostic beliefs with them. They influenced the Church and eventually, Gnosticism and other forms of Hellenized thinking displaced the true faith and all but destroyed God’s Church, save for a small group that had to ultimately flee for their lives into the wilderness.

As the late Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong used to say, up until around 90 AD or so, the NT Church remained pretty much intact, holding to the tenets originally taught by Christ. They still had some of the original apostles as their writers, lastly John who wrote the book of Revelation some time in the 90’s. But at the close of the 1st century, a curtain falls on history and there is not much written for the next 100 or so years. When the curtain rises in the 3rd century, we find a church that does not at all resemble the original primitive church.

Now whether Herbert Armstrong or anyone else said it, that’s a fact of history. This is where Alan’s book is invaluable – it fills in the missing details of what happened during that “missing” century of Church history. Through his extensive research, he has uncovered many heretofore unknown facts about this period.

Gnosticism had infiltrated the church – like Jude reported – in the form of these men who crept in unnoticed or “unawares” as the KJV puts it. And by the third century, they had all but absorbed the original church, save for the few that escaped – still holding onto the original true faith. It was a subtle, Satanic change, done slowly over a period of time.

This is also what is still happening in the Church of God today – Gnosticism is alive and well, although it is not called by that name. But the false teachings are the same: anything having to do with the physical or material, that is your goods, your body, etc., is of no value or concern to God. The emphasis, rather, is on the spiritual, the “immortal soul” which they believe person has, and in nurturing, purifying and strengthening it so it can return back to heaven where it came from.

Now these ideas don't sound all that different from the true doctrines taught in the Bible. But Satan doesn't work by bold, drastic 180 degree changes – that would never be accepted by the average man. Instead, he is the master of subtly. Notice this description of him in **Genesis 3**.

Genesis 3:1 Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made...

He still works by making subtle changes to God's truth.

Now this Gnostic belief system is where the concept of "cheap grace" comes in. They taught that nothing you do in this body is of any consequence – that you can do whatever you want in this flesh and God doesn't care. They would say that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ covers your sins – therefore you can do whatever you want.

Paul wrote much about grace and what these Gnostics would do is twist Paul's teachings. They would say that Paul taught that not only can you return to sinning after accepting Christ's sacrifice, but that God is pleased when you sin because it allows Him to be more forgiving and merciful and extend even more grace to you. This encouragement to sin is a booby trap, as we'll come to see.

But this is definitely NOT what Paul was teaching! In fact, we'll see that he had to combat this rumor that had been spread that he was teaching "cheap grace". Let's see this in **Romans 3**. Paul is addressing a mixed crowd composed of both Jews and Romans. The Jews had brought along their Hebrew faith and the Romans, having been Hellenized, brought along their particular flavor of Gnosticism.

Romans 3:1-2 "What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit *is there* of circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God."

What Paul is saying is that the original, untainted Hebrew faith, not the rabbinical system that came out of Babylonian captivity having been Hellenized, more closely resembled the truth.

Verse 3 "For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect?"

Even if some were unfaithful, this does not nullify the faithfulness of God.

Verse 5-6 "But if our unrighteousness commend [shows up or confirms] the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance [inflicts punishment]? (I speak as a man) [with human reasoning] God forbid: for then how shall God judge the world?"

Here we see this Gnostic teaching, that God desires our unrighteousness so He can show His righteousness, is being criticized by Paul.

Verses 7-8 "For if the truth of God hath more abounded through my lie unto his glory; why yet am I also judged as a sinner? And not *rather*, (**as we be slanderously reported**, and as some affirm that we say) Let us do evil, that good may come? whose damnation is just."

In other words, Paul is saying "Why not just do evil that good may come from it (as I have been slanderously reported to have taught)?" To condemn such who would spread such a lie is just. We'll

see more of this sort of thing as we study the book of Romans. But this is a good foundation – **this is what Grace is NOT.** Grace is NOT license to sin.

What Grace Is

Now we'll look at what Grace really is. This will not be a long treatment on the Law versus Grace. We have other sermon tapes covering this topic. There is our 11 part series on God's Law of Love, which covers the need for Christians to keep God's Commandments and this series goes into great detail on each one of the Ten Commandments. But we do need to find out what Grace is before we can answer the question, "How do we grow in Grace?"

(Digression)

Let me digress a moment and say that, as you discover what Gnosticism was and still is and how it brought up issues in the early NT church, you begin to have a much greater understanding of Paul's writings. In times past, we've had to mumble past some of these scriptures and give at best, inaccurate explanations. This is where Alan Knight's book has provided a great service to the Church of God in helping us to see how these subtle perversions crept into the church at the very beginning.

Notice in Romans 10. Paul begins talking about praying for the salvation of Israel, because they had zeal for God, but not according to knowledge (remember we are to grow in grace AND knowledge).

Romans 10:1-3 *"Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God."*

Rather than follow after God's righteousness, that is, keeping His Commandments, they tried to do it their own way.

Verses 4-5 *"For Christ [is] the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them."*

Notice this does not say what some would like it to say – that Christ ended the Law. Rather, He is the end, outcome or the result – the final product of keeping the law.

This is the same Greek word [Telos] used in **1 Peter 1:9**, *"Receiving the **end** of your **faith**, even the salvation of your souls."*, clearly meaning that the outcome or result of our being faithful is our salvation. Let's continue in verse 6.

Verses 6-7, *" But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down [from above]:) Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead) "*

Paul is attacking that Gnostic belief that the soul descends down from heaven through the planets. Without an understanding of Gnosticism, this passage would sound very strange and hard to understand.

(End of Digression)

So let's continue our discussion on Grace by turning to Romans 1:5. We all know that the sacrifice and death of Jesus Christ was necessary for the forgiveness of our past sins. His blood covers our

sins and this is one aspect of the Grace of God – that of forgiveness of our past transgressions. But here we'll see another, second type of God's Grace.

Romans 1:5 "By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name:"

Notice, grace was received for obedience. There is a condition for us to continue to receive and to grow in grace.

Romans 3:21-22 "But now the righteousness of God without [apart from] the law is manifested, being witnessed by [though testified to by] the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God [which is] by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference:"

Again, this does not do away with the law, as it says God's righteousness is testified to by the Law and prophets. Paul is showing us that we need to change our attitude toward the law – to stop looking at it from a physical viewpoint as ancient Israel did, do to approach righteousness from a spiritual position – the faith of Jesus Christ (who kept His Father's Commandments).

Verse 23-25 "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth [to be] a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;"

Here is that first type of Grace – forgiveness of our past sins through the blood of Jesus Christ. We have all sinned and we cannot atone for our own sins, so we must accept the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and thereby accept the grace that God extends to us. This is pretty basic Christianity. But we must establish this as a foundation.

The problem is for many Christians, this is where it ends. They figure that when they accept Christ, their sins are forgiven, now and forever, and they can go back to their old sinful ways. Then God can be happy because He can extend more grace to them and they can sin more and on and on. But that's not the way it works.

Turn to **Romans 6**. This is where Paul goes on to show the error of what the Gnostics believed then and what modern Christians believe now to be true: that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ covers all your sins, past present and future, and that's all there is to it – you can go on and sin to your heart's content so God can continue to extend His grace to you.

Romans 6:1-2 "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?"

"This isn't the way it works, folks!" Paul is saying. He's attacking the prevailing Gnostic ideas, ideas that are still being preached in Christian churches today!

Verse 3-5 "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also *in the likeness* of his resurrection:"

We are supposed to be dead to sin, not continue in it. We die a symbolic death to sin in the waters of baptism and are symbolically resurrected to a newness of life. This is a type of being born again – not the final fulfillment when we are truly resurrected from death at Christ's return and then are

literally born again as a spirit being in God's Family. Paul is speaking of a type of that resurrection. We'll see more about this in John's writings later on.

Verse 6 "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with *him*, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin."

Notice, we should not serve sin any longer.

Verse 7 "For he that is dead is freed from sin."

This is a metaphor. Some will pick up on this and say, "See, we are under grace and not the law – we don't have to follow the law." This does not say we are free from sinning or that we cannot sin. It means we are freed from the penalty of sin which is death, as we'll see in the last verse of this chapter.

Verse 8-11 "Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

So what does this mean to be alive to God through Jesus? If it meant what Paul was falsely accused of preaching – that it doesn't matter what you do in this body – he wouldn't have made the following statements.

Verse 12-14 "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members *as* instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace."

Here's where many go astray – not understanding what this means to be under the law or under grace. It does not say what many would like to read in here – that there is no law so you are under grace. Rather it says you are not under the penalty of the law. Notice:

Verse 15-16 "What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid. Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of **obedience** unto righteousness?"

Now we're getting somewhere. Paul mentions obedience – obedience to what?

Verse 17-18, But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of **righteousness**.

Psalms 119:172 tells us, "My tongue shall speak of thy word: for all thy commandments *are* **righteousness**."

Verse 19-23, I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness. For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness. What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things [is] death. But now being

made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. For the wages of sin *is* death; but the gift of God *is* eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

You see, the penalty of sin – death – is what we are free from, but only if we serve righteousness. The gift of God is eternal life **through** Jesus Christ. In other words, we must become like Jesus Christ – follow after His footsteps – keep the Father’s commandments as He did – if we are to receive this gift. This does not mean we save ourselves by our own works. We set ourselves on the path toward righteous. It is Christ living in us – through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit – the empowers us to do good works and follow the Law. These are Christ’s works, not ours.

Now notice in **2 Peter 2:22**. We can’t go back to our former sinful way of life, as those who preach “cheap grace” believe. Peter refutes this concept in a very graphic manner.

2 Peter 2:22 “But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog *is* turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.”

Grace is **not** unmerited pardon. The initial grace extended to us is conditional upon our accepting Jesus Christ’s sacrifice for our past sins. God then extends His favor to us in forgiving us of our sins. We gain His favor by doing what is pleasing to Him, namely, choosing to follow the example of Jesus Christ. That’s what we saw in the baptism symbolism – that we follow Christ into His death and then into His resurrection.

Some don’t like the definition of “favor” for grace. But if *charis* means “unmerited pardon” as some have been erroneously taught for years, how could Jesus, who never sinned, grow in unmerited pardon? And especially in unmerited pardon with man! Notice **Luke 2:52**.

Luke 2:52 “And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.”

The translation of **charis** as "favor" here is obviously the correct one. It is easy to understand that Jesus grew in favor with God and man.

In **Luke 4:22** the people were amazed at the gracious (favorable to men) words which proceeded out of Jesus' mouth. Here the Greek word for gracious is *charis*.

In **Acts 2:46-47** we find the disciples : "...having *charis* with all the people".

Acts 2:46-47 “And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having **favor** with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.”

In **Acts 7:10** we find God gave Joseph *charis* in the sight of Pharaoh. The KJV has translated *charis* as "favor" here.

Acts 7:10 And delivered him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favour and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house.

In other places we find *charis* translated favor (**Acts 25:3, Luke 1:30, Acts 7:46**).

Favor is the obvious meaning.

So why do so many Christian minister reject the definition of “favor” and instead choose to substitute “unmerited pardon”? Because they have been affected by the Gnostic teachings that we don’t have to do anything to please God – that God even prefers to have us sin so He can show how gracious He is in forgiving us.

But we in the church of God know that what Christians DO does matter! We must keep the commandments! We know that! Notice in **Acts 5:32**

Acts 5:32 And we are his witnesses of these things; and [so is] also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.

God gives His Holy Spirit to those who **obey** Him! God give His **favor** [charis] to those who set their feet upon the paths of righteousness, following God’s Way, trying to please Him by developing His character – which is outlined for us in the Ten Commandments and expounded in the rest of scripture.

Sure, we are still human and we will stumble and fall as we follow this Way. But this is where the second part of Grace comes in. God will extend His grace to those who are trying to follow His Law. That’s why those who do so are said to not be under the Law, because they will merit God’s favor – His Grace – because they are determined to please Him. Those that make no attempt to follow the Law – those who blatantly sin – are those on whom God will turn His back. They are still under the penalty of the Law because they still continue in their sinful way of life.

Let me try to illustrate this concept with an example from human society.

We all know that certain prisoners have their time – their penalty for breaking the law – reduced because of good behavior. Such men get this favor from a judge because they are trying to show their willingness to change their life – to walk in step with the law. No one get time off for bad behavior – for repeatedly breaking the law with no sign of remorse and no demonstrated desire to change.

Why is it we can see this clearly in the world with the civil laws, but when it comes to God and His Laws we want to take the exact opposite view?

A better analogy might be that of a father toward his children. Would any of you who are parents extend your grace or favor toward a child who repeatedly disobeys you? No, of course not! But rather, you extend favor toward your obedient children. After all, what is God if not our Father?

Let’s turn now the book of Ephesians. Paul is again talking to converted gentiles – those who came out of a Gnostic background.

Ephesians 2:4-5 “But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by **grace** ye are saved).”

Here’s that first step – grace which saves us from the death penalty caused by our past sins. We can’t save ourselves because “all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.” So we need this first type of grace

Ephesians 2:6-7 “And hath raised [us] up together, and made [us] sit together in heavenly [places] in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in [his] kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.”

This show that in the future, we will continue to receive God's favor because we have follow the lead of Jesus by allowing ourselves to be led by the Holy Spirit. Now here's the verses most often quoted by those who believe the Gnostic idea that nothing we do in this flesh matters to God.

Ephesians 2:8-9 "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast."

The problem is – here's where most Christians stop. They believe this passage supports the same idea that the early Gnostics held to – that advanced spirituality can be attained by rejecting the principle of law. That would be like suggesting that in order to eliminate criminals from our society, we should abolish all laws. That way, no one could break a law so there would be no more criminals. You can see that this approach makes no sense

But that is not what Paul is saying, as the next verse shows.

Ephesians 2:10, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."

See, we are created to do good works. But this is not our doing, but it is Christ living in us. We are doing His works – developing His character by obedience to God's commandments. We follow the lead of Jesus – the captain of our salvation as scripture calls Him. If we board a plane and fly to another city, we would not be able to say we flew on our own power, any more than a Christian can claim to earn their salvation. But we must buy the ticket and get on the plane. We must stay with the flight – not bail out midway through the journey.

As I said before, we will stumble and fall along the way as we try to walk in this newness of life. We do not earn our salvation by these works, but rather it is Christ living in us that is changing us and helping to make us better and better until...

Ephesians 4:13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ:

Let's see how we eventually come to this perfection that we are striving for. Turn to **John 1:8**. John was also dealing with these Gnostics and this idea that God is not concerned with what we do in the flesh – that we can go on sinning and God will go on extending His grace to us. John makes some very pointed statements in regard to that concept.

1 John 1:8 "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."

John is addressing Christians here, saying that after baptism, if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves. You see, the Gnostics would say that after baptism, we can't sin anymore because we are not under the law but under grace – that since we are not under the law, we can't break the law anymore. John says this is self-deception.

1 John 1:9-10 "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."

John goes on to point out that if [when] we sin, we should confess those sins and God will extend His grace or favor to us and cleanse us from those sins. John says that if we take the Gnostic approach and say that we have not sinned, God's word isn't in us – we don't understand His word at all.

1 John 2:1 “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”

Notice that John upholds that same approach to sin that Paul did – that we should not sin, but if we do, we have an advocate with God – Jesus Christ.

1 John 5:18 “We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.”

This first part is talking about our future state as born-again beings when we actually become the children of God, converted into spirit being by the resurrection. In this state, we will sin no more, being free from our carnal bodies and natures.

But the second part correctly states that he who is begotten. We are now only begotten, not yet born-again. We have an earnest, a down payment of the Holy Spirit now, eventually to be composed entirely of Spirit. But those to whom God has begotten by the gift of His Holy Spirit (remember that He gives His Spirit to those who please Him), are told here to keep themselves from the Evil One – Satan.

So that’s how grace works. We seek God and He extends His grace to us initially by applying the sacrifice of Jesus Christ to atone for our past sins, thus reconciling us to God [use bank account analogy]. Then, if we set our feet upon the right path of life [Christ is the Way], God continues to extend His grace to us when we confess our sins and truly seek His forgiveness.

How Do We Grow In Grace

So how do we **grow** in grace and knowledge. I think we all realize that we grow in knowledge by studying. You read a book and you grow in knowledge. I read Alan Knight’s book and now I have more knowledge of Gnosticism than I did before. But how do we grow in Grace?

Salvation is a process of growing and overcoming. Seven time in the book of Revelation Christ tell us to overcome – but overcome what. Not sin, because Jesus overcame sin for us – dying for our sins. We need to overcome our carnal nature – our desire to sin. We must develop the nature of Jesus Christ by following Him and trying to measure up to His example. This is a life-long process.

In the book of Deuteronomy we find God telling something to ancient Israel. If they ever slipped and stumbled and got into a jam, they should seek Him

Deuteronomy 4:29 But if from thence thou shalt seek the LORD thy God, thou shalt find *him*, if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul.

It’s the same with us. We must truly seek God and then He will extend His grace to us.

So let’s see how this process works.

James 4:1-8 (NKJV) “¹ Where do wars and fights *come* from among you? ...”

They were fighting – it’s the same today, whether we throw stones or hurl scriptures and methods of church governance at each other, the root cause is the same – LUST.

Verse 1 continued “... Do *they* not *come* from your *desires* for pleasure that war in your members? ² You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain.

You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. ³ You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend *it* on your pleasures.”

We try to take things for ourselves rather than going to the source of all blessings. When we do ask for things, we have a selfish attitude and consume it on our lusts.

Verse 4 “Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”

This does not mean that you can’t or shouldn’t have friends in the world. We just should not befriend the worldly systems – all based on Satan’s way of get.

Verses 5-8 Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"? But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "*God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.*" Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse *your* hands, *you* sinners; and purify *your* hearts, *you* double-minded. [DO NOT FEAR DEMONS]

"*God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.*" Does this ring a bell – maybe something you’ve read in the book of Isaiah? Notice this well known passage in Isaiah chapter 66:

Isaiah 66:2 (NKJV) “For all those *things* My hand has made, And all those *things* exist," Says the LORD. "But on this *one* will I look: On *him who is* poor and of a contrite spirit, And who trembles at My word.”

Trembles at His Word – meaning tries diligently to keep God’s laws.

Law Keeping Required

Now let’s notice an important few verses in the book of Ephesians. If you could only turn to one scripture to show that the keeping of the law is necessary in order to stay in God’s good graces, this one would be it.

Colossians 3:1-2 (NKJV) “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.”

Paul is addressing a group of former Gnostics and he uses the same analogy of sharing in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ as he did in Romans (*if you then be risen with Christ...*). Paul is also making a play on words, using phraseology reminiscent of the Gnostic belief that seeking spiritual perfection meant nothing done is this flesh matters. But notice...

Colossians 3:3-10 (NKJV) “For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ *who is* our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them. But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new *man* who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him [that is, growing in knowledge by DOING good works – following the example of Jesus].”

We can clearly see in the above passage that we are to stop sinning and begin to follow Jesus' example of keeping God's Law. But brethren, I want to warn you about a pitfall that many Christians fall into. If you compare the way you conduct your life with the world around you, we will always appear to be more righteous than the unconverted. But as the world's standards of behavior slide downward, it's all too easy to slide down with them, always keeping a little bit above the world.

But the world is NOT our standard of character - Jesus is. We need to stop comparing our conduct to the world and start looking to Jesus' example.

1 Peter 2:21 (NKJV) "For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps."

Draw Close To God And He'll Draw Close To You

So let's look at a beautiful example of how God draws close to one who is trying to draw close to Him. This psalm, of course describes the Messiah and was quoted in the NT as referring to Him, but it also applies to one who follows the lead of his Savior and Redeemer.

Psalm 91:9-16 (NKJV) "Because you have made the LORD, *who is* my refuge, *Even* the Most High, your dwelling place, No evil shall befall you, Nor shall any plague come near your dwelling; For He shall give His angels charge over you, To keep you in all your ways. In *their* hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone. You shall tread upon the lion and the cobra, The young lion and the serpent you shall trample underfoot. **"Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore I will deliver him;** I will set him on high, because he has known My name. He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; I *will be* with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honor him. With long life I will satisfy him, And show him My salvation."

This does not mean that a Christian will not have trials and troubles in life. But how many of really know how many times God has intervened in our lives to protect us from harm?

But **because we have set our love upon God**, He gives us His grace and delivers us.

Brethren, today we have taken a brief look at the subtle, yet highly destructive error of "cheap grace" that has crept into the Christian faith. This is perhaps the most heinous con-job that Satan has perpetrated on mankind – to get them to believe that the more they sin, the closer they get to God.

Isaiah 59:1-2 "Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid *his* face from you, that he will not hear."

Because of the great mercy of our loving Father, those who have unwittingly bought in to this false idea will still be given a chance to understand true grace and all the rest of His Plan for them. Most of humanity is not being judged at this time. But now is the time for judgment on the house of God – the Church – as Peter states. This has become a big problem in the Churches of God, who should know better. This is the main reason that Alan Knight wrote his book on this subject.

Let's look at one final to receiving the grace and mercy of our Lord. Please turn to Jude verse 21.

Jude 1:21 "Keep yourselves in the **love of God**, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life."

Here we are instructed that if we want the mercy of our Lord, we need to keep ourselves in the love of God. But let's not assume we know what the love of God really is. Let's let the Bible define this for us.

1 John 5:3 "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous."

God's commandments are not grievous because they are based upon Love. They are our guidelines to growing in grace and knowledge.

Jude 1:24-25, "Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling [by extending His Grace to us as we try, but stumble and fall along the Way toward His righteousness] , and to present you faultless [when we are truly born again into God's Family, never to sin again] before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen."

Brethren, now that we have the correct understanding —let us Grow in Grace!