

The Christian Life Series—Book 6

Grace and Sanctification



1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

May God Himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and He will do it.

Alaska Christian Ministry to Seafarers

Foreword

Our subject for this book, the sixth in our series on *The Christian Life—*

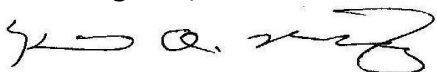
Starting with the Basics, is sanctification. However, I have come to really enjoy our pairing of topics in each lesson, so today we will include the subject of grace and its relationship

to sanctification. The reason is simple—sanctification in the life of the believer is no more accomplished by our strength of will than was our salvation from an eternal destiny in hell to one in heaven.

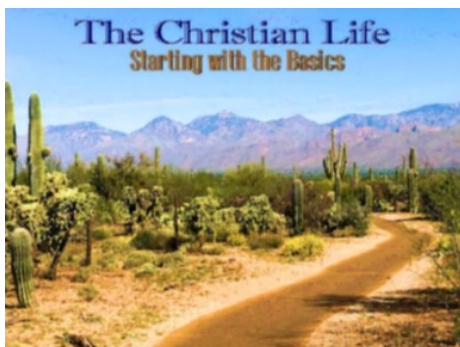
We were saved by God's grace from hell to heaven, and it is equally important for us to understand that none of us will ever be sanctified apart from the grace of God.

So as you can see, we have another good pairing of topics to investigate.

In His grace,



Kevin Redig, pastor-teacher



All Scripture quotes have been taken from either the NKJV (1992 edition) or the NIV (1984 edition).

Grace and Sanctification

Welcome to another in our series of lessons on the basics of living the Christian Life. The topics we are covering are the things that every Christian needs to know and apply in order to live a God-pleasing and God-dependent life. This Christian Life spans the entire interval of time between trusting in Christ for eternal life and going to be with Him forever in the home Jesus has prepared for each of us who now belong to Him.

By way of illustration, take a look at the graphic on the facing page. The path winding through the desert is illustrative of the life we live. To find our way on that path, we need the Word of God every day. Further, there are times we need to simply rest in our incredible position in Christ, our family status as a child of God, while checking our tendency to carnality and confessing any and every sin so that we would remain in blessed fellowship with our Savior.

Successfully living the Christian Life takes all the things we have covered. I trust by now you have realized how important it is for each of us to keep in the Word, keep learning truth, and keep growing. The truth we learn is our safeguard against the lures of the world, the wiles of Satan, and the deceitfulness of the sin nature within. As we continue forward in this life, there is always another bit of truth to tuck away in the soul, and another opportunity to walk by faith as we apply that truth to the life before us.

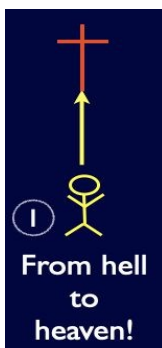
As we push on today, our main emphasis will be the topic of sanctification, but I have found it so much of a blessing to look at contrasting pairs. As a result, we will also include the topic of grace. As you will see, there is a very important connection between the two.

Let's begin with the concept of grace!

An Introduction to the Grace of God

Grace shows up literally everywhere! It starts with the first aspect, or phase, of our salvation—when we change our eternal destiny from one in hell to one in heaven as the result of faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. Ephesians 2:8-9



Then grace is there again as part of the Christian Life as we seek to *walk worthy* of who and what we are in Christ.



God's grace is sufficient for every challenge as we live the second phase of our salvation—the challenges we face during our days on this earth as a believer in Jesus

Christ prior to spending eternity with Him in glory.

Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from Me. But He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness."

II Corinthians 12:9

God's grace is centered in a person—none other than the Lord Jesus Christ!

For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. John 1:17

In fact, all men have been recipients of God's grace in one form or another—even those who have rejected Jesus as Savior. In fact, if lost mankind only knew how much they were dependent upon the ongoing grace of God for their

very survival, they might be more receptive to their need of salvation.

**He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good,
and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.**

Matthew 5:45

What Is Grace?

To be more specific about the definition of grace, let's start with the definition from a Greek lexicon. The word commonly translated grace comes from the Greek word *charis*. The word has a range of meanings in addition to grace including joy, favor, and benefit. These nuances of meaning are the source of the often-stated definition of grace—*God's unmerited favor*. In other words, God provides, apart from our earning or deserving what He provides.

When a sinner, who deserves eternal damnation, is saved solely by faith in the work of Jesus as Savior apart from any merit or worth of his or her own, it is an example of God's grace. This is why we find such straight-forward declarations in Scripture to precisely this truth:

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.

Ephesians 2:8-9

When we have an abstract concept such as grace, that takes on additional meaning within the context of Scripture, it is often very useful to look at usage and see if we can glean additional understanding. I have looked at every use of the word grace in the Scriptures and have found that, although it is used in a wide variety of contexts, it is characterized by the consistent theme of God meeting man's need apart from him earning or deserving it. My working definition of the word grace, developed from usage, is:

The Grace of God is seen in His abundant answer to mankind's ever-changing need!

When I use the term abundant, I mean that God's grace is beyond expectation and perfect in terms of meeting our needs. The absence of works on the part of man in order to receive the outworking of God's grace could not be any more clearly stated than it is in Romans 11:6:

And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.

Who Receives God's Grace?

Although one has to be careful when crossing from the Old to the New Testaments, I am nonetheless of the mind that God has consistently worked with His needy creation on the basis of grace. We can see this from the very beginning of God's revelation to us in Genesis Chapters 1-3. God provided a perfect environment for Adam and Eve that they did not work for nor deserve. Then, when they rebelled, who clothed them and promised a Savior to come? God, in grace, did! What did Adam and Eve do to deserve their covering of skins and the promise of a redeemer? Nothing at all! That's what makes it the grace of God.

When it comes to the nation of Israel, without question their national blessing (or cursing) was related to their obedience to the Mosaic Law. But even then, within the context of their failure, we see the desire of God to be gracious to His people. Consider Isaiah 30:18, which is a message from God, through the prophet Isaiah, to a nation struggling to trust Him:

Yet the Lord longs to be gracious to you; He rises to show you compassion.

Isaiah 30:18

What does the Lord want to do with a people on the edge of rebellion? He longs to be gracious to them. He even rises to initiate compassion—the greater toward the lesser! That's the kind of God we worship.

Then, when it comes to the Church, what tremendous blessing we have in the person of Jesus Christ:

From the fullness of His grace we have all received one blessing after another.

John 1:16

We'll come back to this verse later, but for now suffice it to say that we have received one blessing after another in our Savior! What is the source of these blessings? It is the fullness of His grace! Do you see the merit of mankind anywhere?

Read the entire first chapter of John's Gospel, and you will see it is nowhere to be found.



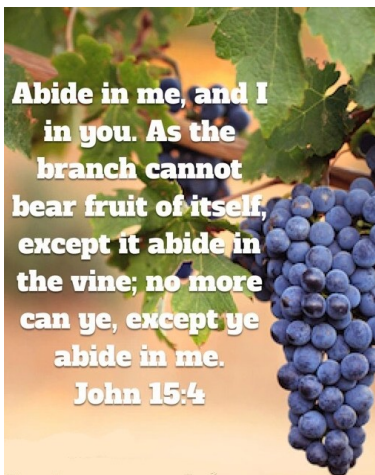
How Does This Relate to Sanctification?

At this point, we have learned just enough to understand why we looked at the topic of grace while seeking to understand the sanctified Christian Life. It is absolutely essential to grasp that it is not possible to live the supernaturally high quality of life to which we are called apart from the grace of God. By this time, you should know that grace means God will supply what we need, and abundantly so, apart from merit on our part. Jesus is quite clear on this:

"Abide in Me and I will abide in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you abide in Me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man abides in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing."

John 15:4-5

If we abide in Christ, we will bear much fruit as the life of Christ works through us. Apart from the life of the one True Vine manifesting Himself in our lives, we can not accomplish anything of value in God's sight! There are, of course, alternative approaches. Many Christians have been told to buckle down, be more committed, yield more, surrender more, and be more zealous for the Lord. These all target self, and are very poor substitutes for abiding in Christ



and manifesting His life.

In fact, these admonitions all get us to focus on the fruit we desire to produce, rather than on the One who is able to produce fruit in our lives. To make matters worse, the outcome of all of these other approaches has already been decreed by Jesus Himself. Let me quote it again, *"apart from Me you can do nothing."*

This doesn't mean we can't impress man. It means we can't accomplish anything of value in God's sight on our own, and He is the audience that matters the most!

How Can We Do This?

Understanding that we have believed in a gracious Savior who has reconciled us to a gracious God is meant to promote a certain mindset. See if you can extract this mindset as the result of examining these two passages:

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Ephesians 1:3-4

And the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will Himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To Him be the power for ever and ever. Amen!

I Peter 5:10-11

The mindset that God understands is that we don't produce in order to be blessed. God doesn't promise to bless if we are devoted enough; on the contrary, God blesses those who are His because He is a gracious God. In the first few verses of the very first chapter of the Book of Ephesians, before asking us to do anything, God has made it clear He has given us every possible spiritual blessing right up front.

But He does have things for us to do as we represent Him as His witnesses to a lost and antagonistic world. Although this may lead to some suffering on our part, it is part of our loving Savior's desire for us to develop into a dependent and devoted relationship with Him. Why would we do so? We do it because He is a gracious God and serving Him is better than serving anything or anyone else. For cravings, addictions, and idols are very cruel masters!

What Else Should We Understand?

Those who emphasize the grace of God are often accused of teaching license! I have been told that the way to get Christians to do what they should is to teach blessing must be earned. This will, in turn, get them to all buckle down in order to earn their share of those blessings. Those who oppose grace want blessings to be a reward for hard work and staying out of trouble! It really incites some of these anti-grace individuals if there is even a hint that God might provide a bit of blessing we don't deserve. They are quite certain that would make Christians lazy, or even worse, make them try to abuse grace. I have learned not to be too worried about these arguments because, although they are always presented with great zeal, they are also presented without a shred of Scripture.

So let's turn to the pages of Scripture, and ask the question, "Does the Bible teach grace as a license to sin?" Paul is quite clear in the following passage that grace has no connection with sin whatsoever.

What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Romans 6:15

The phrase translated "*By no means*" is actually the strongest way you can negate something in the Greek language. It really should include a shout of "No way!" along with the pounding of a fist on the table.

Then consider the following passage from Titus. I always try to bring my teaching on the subject of grace back to it.

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the Blessed Hope. . . Who gave Himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for Himself a people that are His very own, eager to do what is good. Titus 2:11-14

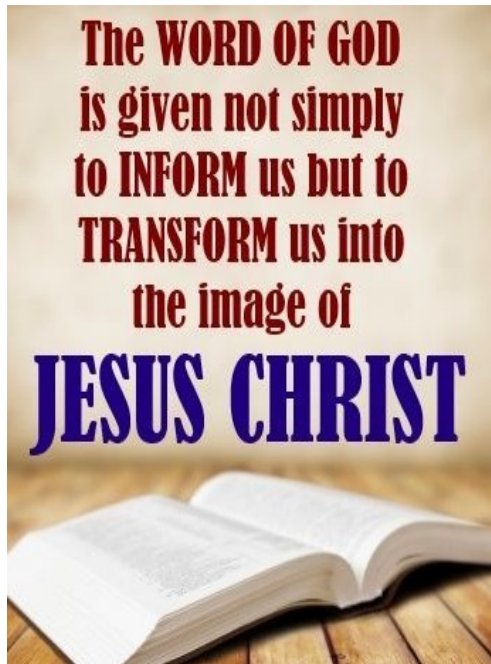
So what exactly does grace teach us? First of all: *It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives. . . .* As that is the outcome of grace properly taught and responded to, where is the license?

It also teaches us to focus upon the certain return of the Lord, which naturally leads to purity and a people eager to please their Lord and Savior. Again I ask, "Where is the license? Where is the promotion of sin?" There is none! The outcome of grace teaching would seem to be exactly what we would want in the Church. Maybe the reason the Church doesn't look like it should is that there is too little teaching of grace rather than too much!

Understanding Our Call to Progressive Sanctification

This is the perfect place to segue to our second topic for this lesson—the subject of sanctification. The transition follows this line of thinking:

- Grace teaches us to say no to some things and yes to other things—while we wait.
- Is it automatic? No! We need to be taught.
- Does every believer instantly fulfill the picture developed in Titus 2, or is it something that has to be progressively developed throughout the course of our Christian Lives?



- The answer, of course, is that sanctification takes time and development.

There you have a simple introduction: The need to fix our attention upon the progressive development of our spiritual lives is the process of sanctification.

What Is Sanctification?

Let's break sanctification down into understandable pieces just like we did for God's grace.

We can start to build our understanding of sanctification by looking at I Thessalonians Chapter 4.

It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable. . . .For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, Who gives you His Holy Spirit. I Thessalonians 4:3-8

There is no beating around the bush. It is God's will that every child of God be sanctified—set apart unto Him! The words translated sanctified and holy in the above scripture are exactly the same Greek word. In fact, the words typically translated holy, sanctify, sanctification, holiness, and sometimes consecrated can typically all be traced back to the same root idea of being set apart unto God.

Now consider two important questions:

- Does the Scripture imply that sanctification is something that is automatic or has to be learned?
- Is it something guaranteed in the life of every believer, or is there the potential for failure?

It is quite clear from this, and many other passages, that when it comes to the quality of the life one lives as unto the Lord, it is something that each believer has to grow into—something that develops over time. In support of this, note how we are told to *learn* to control our bodies in a way that is holy (set apart) and honorable.

Further, our sanctification is clearly something which can be derailed along the way if we are not on our guard. The tone of the above passage is directive and cautionary. God's standard has been laid out, and we are expected to move in obedience, although it is quite clear our rejection is a possibility.



Given that the sanctification commanded in I Thessalonians Chapter 4 is something that is part of our spiritual growth, it is often referred to as *progressive sanctification*. This acknowledges the truth that being conformed to the image and likeness of Christ is something that we will not achieve in this life, but rather need to pursue until the Lord calls us home!

As we begin to understand this idea of sanctification, let's consider another text of Scripture to reinforce the idea that sanctification is God's call on every believer, and it consists of a life set apart unto Him:

But join with me in suffering for the Gospel, by the power of God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of His own purpose and grace.

II Timothy 1:8-9

We are called to a holy life—one that is meant to be progressively set apart to Him as we grow in the grace and knowledge of our Savior.

Can You Make That Clearer?

Let's try to better define this concept of sanctification. As mentioned earlier, the root idea associated with the Greek words translated sanctification, holy, and other related words is the idea of being set apart for special service or function. In some cases it includes the idea of purification. By studying the usage of these varied words throughout the text of Scripture, allow me to share my understanding of those texts which speak of our progressive sanctification:

*Sanctification in the life of the child of God is the process of being increasingly set apart unto God in term of purity, priority, exclusivity, and service—
saints by virtue of position and experience.*

We have studied the exalted nature of the position that is ours by virtue of our union with Christ, as shown on the diagram on the next page. The passages that speak of our experience explicitly address God's call for us to live a life separated unto Him. For example:

**. . .rid yourselves of all malice, deceit, hypocrisy,
envy and slander. . .** I Peter 2:1

**. . .clothe yourself with compassion, kindness,
humility, gentleness and long-suffering. . .**
Colossians 3:12-13

The above verses could all be categorized under the label of *grow up in your salvation*, showing the progressive nature of what is to occur in the life of the believer. The connection between our position and the progressive nature of our sanctified experience is made ever so clear in Hebrews:

**For by one offering He has perfected forever those
who are being sanctified.** Hebrews 10:14

We are being sanctified—or at least we should be—and it is a work in progress as we grow spiritually. Yet at the same



Time, our position before God is perfect, solely because we are in union with a perfect Savior—the Lord Jesus Christ.

To further clarify, let's see if we can identify this process of sanctification in the Scriptures, even if it is not explicitly labeled that way. We'll start with a passage from the fourth chapter of Ephesians. Notice the process that is occurring.

You were taught with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which was being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Ephesians 4:22-24

Did you catch the teaching/learning that is going on? Of course this has to be a process, for learning is by definition a process. To be like God is neither guaranteed, nor does it occur in an instant even with the best of intentions.

Next, in Romans 8, we see a process in which we have to change from living according to the flesh to living by the Spirit—something that is very likely to take time and involve

a failure or two along the way! It will likewise take time for a new believer to live a quality of life that meets and exceeds the righteous requirements of God's Holy Law to Israel.

And so He condemned sin in sinful man in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit. Romans 8:3-4

Then consider this passage in I Peter that could not be more descriptive with respect to the idea of progression. It encourages all of us to *grow up* into the salvation that we have received through faith in Christ. This growth consists of getting rid of that which was part of the old life and replacing it with that which we learn from the Word. This process, should it occur, is the process of progressive sanctification in the life of the believer.

Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation. . . I Peter 2:1-3

Can You Provide an Example?

I find God's guidelines to Israel upon their entrance into the Promised Land to be a very helpful physical analog of the spiritual challenge of ongoing sanctification in the lives of those who now make up the Church. Consider first the physical illustration set up by God's instructions to Israel:

"When you cross the Jordan into Canaan, drive out all the inhabitants of the land before you."

Numbers 33:51-51

"But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land, those you allow to remain will become barbs in your eyes and thorns in your sides. They will give you trouble. . ."

Numbers 33:55



Unfortunately for Israel, they started well but then turned from God's instructions when the going got more difficult. Of course, things turned out exactly as God said they would. The people they left in the land drew Israel into all kinds of sin, which resulted in all kinds of discipline from the Lord. Now consider the spiritual parallel, which can be stated as follows:

Unless we are continually enlarging our territory (growing spiritually), and continually driving out the worldliness to which we are prone, our immaturity and worldly thinking will compromise our spiritual lives—leading to discipline, in time, and lack of reward in eternity.

In short, this describes the consequences should we ignore the will of God for our lives—ongoing sanctification! There is so much at stake, it behooves us to keep growing spiritually and to continually watch for and drive out the worldliness that keeps trying to infiltrate our lives.

What are the agents, or means, by which our lives are progressively sanctified unto the Lord?

- The Word of God!

"Sanctify them by the truth; Thy Word is truth."

John 17:17

- The Spirit of God!

. . . through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of Life has set me free from the law of sin and death.

Romans 8:2

There are many other contributing factors to our growing into a life that is set apart unto God in terms of purity, priority, exclusivity, and service, but the enabling power of the Holy Spirit and the guiding light of the Word of God are primary in accomplishing the will of God with respect to our sanctification. Without these two, we wouldn't know what a sanctified life looks like, nor would we have the power to make any kind of real and lasting change.

When Can We Say We Have Arrived?

At what point can we claim to have arrived—to have completed the process of sanctification? Can we reach a point at which it is no longer possible to make progress? We certainly will not have arrived any time prior to going home to be with the Lord! However, we should certainly have confidence that things will be much different at the point we do. What a blessing it will be to know the Lord more fully!

Let me suggest that as we come to know Him fully, we will be pure before Him. He will be our priority, and we will be—without conflict—exclusively His!

For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

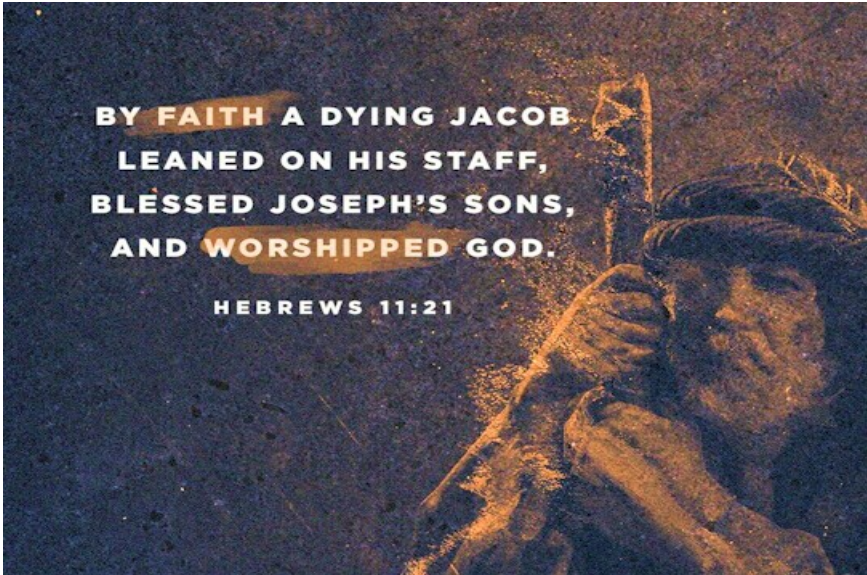
I Corinthians 13:12

There is something else that I find very encouraging. Let me suggest that it is possible for us to keep on making spiritual progress—being set apart unto the Lord that little bit more—right up until the end of our lives on this earth.

By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons, and worshipped as he leaned on the top of his staff.

Hebrews 11:21

God decided to draw attention to Jacob's act by putting it in Hebrews Chapter 11 as an illustration of God-pleasing faith. For the first time in his life, Jacob stopped striving and instead worshipped God. It took him until he was 140 years old, right at the close of his life, to reach the point of trusting God to the point that God took note. This example tells us that, should we choose to keep growing in the truth of His Word and walking in the power of the Holy Spirit, we too can set apart every aspect of our lives just that little bit more. By continuing to grow and live in obedience to the will of the Father, we can bring glory to our Lord and Savior regardless of our age!



**BY FAITH A DYING JACOB
LEANED ON HIS STAFF,
BLESSED JOSEPH'S SONS,
AND WORSHIPPED GOD.**

HEBREWS 11:21

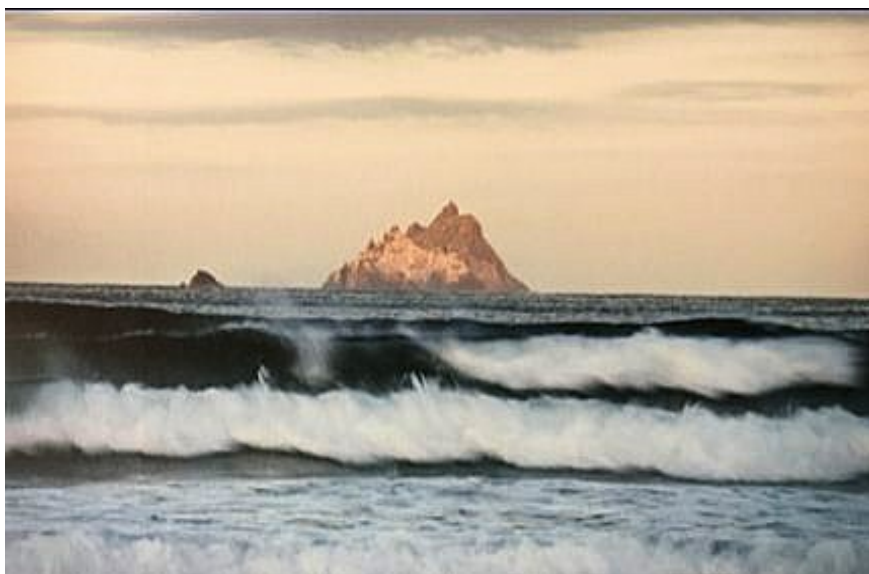
Connecting Grace and Sanctification

If you have a need, then God has an answer.

From the fulness of His grace we have all received one blessing after (in exchange for) **another.** John 1:16

First, let me develop the Scripture, and then explain how the picture below provides an illustration. Earlier in this booklet, we introduced the subject of grace. John 1:16 tells us that from the fullness of the grace that is found in the Lord Jesus Christ, we have received one blessing after another. However, the preposition translated *after* also means *in exchange for* and I think that translation promotes a better understanding.

If we have a need, then the concept of grace prompts us to understand that God has an abundant answer ready to meet that need. As any need arises in our lives, our Savior will meet that need by grace. Then, when the next need arises, He will meet that need too—by grace. So as our



lives unfold and one need after another arises, we will receive from our Lord one grace blessing in exchange for another, in exchange for another.

You can remind yourself of this recurring outpouring of grace by picturing the surf rolling in on a beach. As one wave washes in, another is right behind it, and another behind it as far as the eye can see! That's what God is desirous to do in the lives of people depending upon Him. All that He does, He does in grace—apart from our being worthy of His blessing or earning it.

Next, let me provide a caution. The grace of God will never be provided in order to gratify self! Rather it is provided to meet needs and promote His purposes in our lives—purposes such as our being conformed to the image and likeness of His son!

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. Romans 8:29

This verse is one way of describing the end result of progressive sanctification—conformity to the likeness of our Savior. In order for this to happen, are we going to have spiritual needs along the way? Of course we are! God will, in grace, provide what we need to meet them.

Finally, consider this question: Is it really possible that we will be brought into conformity to the likeness of our Savior? As we consider the enormity of this goal, we might also ask: Who could pull this off? Does anyone actually have the resources to get the job done?

. . .in order that in the coming ages He might show the incomparable riches of His grace expressed in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus. . .The one who calls you is faithful and He will do it. . .being confident of this, that He who began a good work within you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 2:7, I Thessalonian 4:24, Philippians 1:6

Of course, God is the One who is going to do it. He is the only One who can do it. He is both committed to His plans and, as the Sovereign Omnipotent Creator of all things, He is more than able to carry them out.

When He has brought me, a sinner saved by grace, into conformity with the likeness of His Son, my testimony will most certainly be that He did it:

. . .in order that in the coming ages He might show the incomparable riches of His grace, expressed in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus. Hebrews 2:7

All glory, praise, and honor belong to Him!

May God provide one grace blessing in exchange for another as you pursue being increasingly set apart unto Him by the enabling power of His Spirit and as guided by His Word.



**. . .being confident of
this, that HE who began
a good work in you
will carry it on
to completion until the day of
CHRIST JESUS**

Philippians 1:6



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