

18 So Jesus said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one *is* good but One, *that is*, God. **Mark 10:18**

Central idea – Contrary to common misconception, we do not earn or forfeit God’s blessings in our daily lives based on our performance. Regardless of our performance we are always dependent on God’s grace, which is His undeserved favor to those who deserve His wrath.

Developing the Discipline of Grace

- 1:** What’s your initial reaction to this statement: “The pursuit of holiness must be anchored in the grace of God, otherwise it is doomed to failure”?
- A. The grace of God and the vigorous pursuit of holiness cannot be brought together; they seem like direct and unequivocal opposites to me, sort of like “jumbo shrimp”.
 - B. The pursuit of holiness sounds to me like legalism and manmade rules.
 - C. An emphasis on grace seems to me like an open door to irresponsible, sinful behavior, setting us free to sin as we please.
 - D. I realize grace and personal discipline go hand in hand.
 - E. I do not understand what it means to live by grace in my daily life, especially the relationship of grace to personal discipline.
 - F. Other (please describe)

2: The picture of a well-chiseled man – with hammer and chisel in hand- depicts how many Christians try to live the Christian life. It seems we are always trying to change ourselves with self-help tools. Put yourself in that picture and consider this book as a tool available to sculpt you. What would be the difference between using this guide as a tool in your hands and letting God use it as a tool in His? What would each of these look like in practical terms?

3: Consider two radically different, but typical, days in your own life. The first one is a good day spiritually for you. The second day is just the opposite. What is each like? At the end of each you have the opportunity to share the gospel.

- A. Would you enter those two witnessing opportunities with different degrees of confidence? Why?
- B. Think back to your last really “good” or really “bad” day. Did God’s blessing seem any more real or remote on one day than the other? Why?

4: The question of good days and God’s blessing raises the question of whether it is possible to somehow be good enough for God. What answers would Jesus or Paul provide?

Matt 5:48 Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

Matt 22:36-39 **36** “Teacher, which *is* the great commandment in the law?” **37** Jesus said to him, “ ‘*You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind* **38** This is *the* first and great commandment. **39** And *the* second is like it: ‘*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*’

Luke 18:9-14 **9** Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: **10** “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. **11** The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. **12** I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.’ **13** And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise *his* eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’ **14** I tell you, this man went down to his house justified *rather* than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

Luke 18:18-25 **18** Now a certain ruler asked Him, saying, “Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” **19** So Jesus said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one *is* good but One, *that is*, God. **20** You know the commandments: ‘*Do not commit adultery,*’ ‘*Do not murder,*’ ‘*Do not steal,*’ ‘*Do not bear false witness,*’ ‘*Honor your father and your mother.*’” **21** And he said, “All these things I have kept from my youth.” **22** So when Jesus heard these things, He said to him, “You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.” **23** But when he heard this, he became very sorrowful, for he was very rich. **24** And when Jesus saw that he became very sorrowful, He said, “How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God! **25** For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”

Romans 3: 9-20 **9** What then? Are we better *than they*? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin.

10 As it is written:

“ *There is none righteous, no, not one;*

11 *There is none who understands;*

There is none who seeks after God.

12 *They have all turned aside;*

They have together become unprofitable;

There is none who does good, no, not one

13 “ *Their throat is an open tomb;*

With their tongues they have practiced deceit:

“ *The poison of asps is under their lips*”

14 “ *Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness*”

15 “ *Their feet are swift to shed blood;*

16 *Destruction and misery are in their ways;*

17 *And the way of peace they have not known.”*

18 “ *There is no fear of God before their eyes.”*

19 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. **20** Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin.

Philippians 3:4-10 **4** though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: **5** circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, *of* the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; **6** concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. **7** But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. **8** Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ **9** and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which *is* from the law, but that which *is* through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; **10** that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, **11** if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. **12** Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.

5: Draw a simple timeline of your life, with three points of time demarcated: your birth, the day of your salvation, and the anticipated day of your death. The cross divides your whole life into two periods – you as an unbeliever and you as a believer. When along this timeline was grace more than a theological concept to you?

6: Bridges makes the point that we have relegated the gospel to the unbeliever and foisted the duties of spiritual disciplines, holiness, and service unto the believer. Is that true in your own experience? How do you suppose that happens?

7: The Pharisee-type believer and the guilt-laden believer both misunderstand the meaning of grace. How so?

8: How does “preaching the gospel to yourself every day” relate to this performance trap?

9: One practical way of “preaching the gospel to yourself” is to adjust the lens through which you read Scripture. When you read scripture, do you see grace everywhere and feel motivated, or do you see only law and duty? **Read 2 Corinthians 5:14 –15** **14** For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; **15** and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.

What do you think motivated Paul? Was it Paul’s love for Christ that compelled him to do good works and pursue holiness? Or was the compelling factor, rather, Christ’s love for Paul?

10: To some, an overemphasis on the gospel raises the specter of “cheap grace”. Does knowing that your sins are and will be forgiven anyway permit you to keep on sinning and grow slack in your spiritual disciplines? Or does knowing forgiveness compel you to pursue holiness with all the more diligence? Compare your answer to those of Jesus and Paul in the following scriptures:

Matthew 23:23-28 23 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier *matters* of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone. 24 Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel! 25 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence.^[a] 26 Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also. 27 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead *men’s* bones and all uncleanness. 28 Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

Luke 9:23-25 23 Then He said to *them* all, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily,^[a] and follow Me. 24 For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. 25 For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost?

Romans 6:1-2, 15-18 1 What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? 2 Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? ...15 What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! 16 Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin *leading* to death, or of obedience *leading* to righteousness? 17 But God be thanked that *though* you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. 18 And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

Galatians 6:13, 16-18 13 For not even those who are circumcised keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh. ...16 And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy *be* upon them, and upon the Israel of God. 17 From now on let no one trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus. 18 Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with your spirit. Amen.

Philippians 3:12-14 12 Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. 13 Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, 14 I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Hebrews 12:14 14 Pursue peace with all *people*, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord

Final Thought: Are you willing to “bask in God’s mercy and grace” as your “highest moment – higher than when you feel smug in your decent performance and cannot think of anything to confess”? How can you go about adopting this attitude?