

Behold the Lamb!

What it Means to be a Christian

Lesson 4: Understanding Faith and Works

Righteousness by Faith

This is one of the most important subjects for a Christian to understand because there are so many, errors taught and believed on these topics! The Bible clearly sorts it out for all who wish to be on the Lord's side in this question. First we will look at the story of the Wesleys and how the truth of 'righteousness by faith' came to them.

In a time of great spiritual darkness, Whitefield and the Wesleys appeared as light bearers for God. Under the rule of the established church the people of England had lapsed into a state of religious decline almost like heathenism. The great truth of justification by faith, so clearly taught by Luther, had been lost sight of; and the Roman principle of trusting to good works to earn salvation, had taken its place.

Whitefield and the Wesleys, who were members of the established church, were sincere seekers for the favor of God. They had been taught to seek this by a virtuous life and obeying all the works and ordinances of religion.

When Charles Wesley at one time fell ill, and thought that death was approaching, he was asked what he rested his hope of eternal life on. His answer was: "I have used my best endeavors to serve God." As the friend who had put the question seemed not to be fully satisfied with his answer, Wesley thought: "What! are not my endeavors a sufficient ground of hope? Would he rob me of my endeavors? I have nothing else to trust to."--John Whitehead, Life of the Rev. Charles Wesley, page 102. In other words, he was depending that his own good works would earn his salvation.

Such was the dense darkness that had settled down on the church, hiding the atonement, robbing Christ of His glory, and turning the minds of men away from their only hope of salvation--the blood of the crucified Redeemer.

Wesley and his associates were led to see that true religion is in the heart, and that God's law extends to the thoughts as well as to the words and actions. Convinced of the necessity of holiness of heart, as well as correct outward behavior, they set out in earnest upon a new life. By the most diligent and prayerful efforts they endeavored to subdue the evils of the natural heart. They lived a life of self-denial, charity, and humiliation, observing with great exactness every measure which they thought could be helpful to them in obtaining what they most desired--holiness which could secure the favor of God. But they did not obtain what they sought. In vain were their endeavors to free themselves from the condemnation of sin or to break its power. It was the same struggle which Luther had experienced, the same question which had tortured his soul; "**How should man be just before God?" Job. 9:2.**

John and Charles Wesley, after being ordained to the ministry, were sent on a mission to America. On board the ship was a company of Moravian missionaries. Violent storms were

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encountered on the passage, and John Wesley, brought face to face with death, felt that he had not the assurance of peace with God. The Germans, on the contrary, manifested a calmness and trust to which he was a stranger.

"I had long before," he says, "observed the great seriousness of their behavior. Of their humility they had given a continual proof, by performing those servile offices for the other passengers which none of the English would undertake; for which they desired and would receive no pay, saying it was good for their proud hearts, and their loving Saviour had done more for them. And every day had given them occasion of showing a meekness which no injury could move. If they were pushed, struck, or thrown about, they rose again and went away; but no complaint was found in their mouth. There was now an opportunity of trying whether they were delivered from the spirit of fear, as well as from that of pride, anger, and revenge. In the midst of the psalm wherewith their service began, the sea broke over, split the mainsail in pieces, covered the ship, and poured in between the decks as if the great deep had already swallowed us up. A terrible screaming began among the English. The Germans calmly sang on. I asked one of them afterwards, 'Were you not afraid?' He answered, 'I thank God, no.' I asked, 'But were not your women and children afraid?' He replied mildly, 'No; our women and children are not afraid to die.'" Whitehead, *Life of the Rev. John Wesley*, page 10.

Upon arriving, Wesley for a short time stayed with the Moravians, and was deeply impressed with their Christian deportment. Of one of their religious services, he wrote: "The great simplicity as well as solemnity of the whole almost made me forget the seventeen hundred years between, and imagine myself in one of those assemblies where form and state were not; but Paul, the tentmaker, or Peter, the fisherman, presided; yet with the demonstration of the Spirit and of power." *Ibid.*, pages 11, 12.

On his return to England, Wesley, under the instruction of a Moravian preacher, arrived at a clearer understanding of Bible faith. He was convinced that he must renounce all dependence upon his own works for salvation and must trust wholly to "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."

At a meeting of the Moravian society in London a statement was read from Luther, describing the change which the Spirit of God works in the heart of the believer. As Wesley listened, faith was kindled in his soul. "I felt my heart strangely warmed, I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation: and an assurance was given me, that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death." *Ibid.*, page 52.

Through long years of wearisome and comfortless striving, years of rigorous self-denial, of reproach and humiliation, Wesley had steadfastly kept to to his one purpose of seeking God. Now he had found Him; and he found that the grace which he had toiled to win by prayers and fasts, by good deeds and self-denial, was a gift, "without money and without price."

Once established in the faith of Christ, his whole soul burned with the desire to spread everywhere a knowledge of the glorious gospel of God's free grace. "I look upon all the world as my parish," he said; "in whatever part of it I am, I judge it meet, right, and my bounden duty, to declare unto all that are willing to hear, the glad tidings of salvation." *Ibid.*, page 74.

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He continued his strict and self-denying life, not now as a way to earn salvation, but the result of faith; the fruit of holiness. The grace of God in Christ is the foundation of the Christian's hope, and that grace will be manifested in obedience. Wesley's life was devoted to the preaching of the great truths which he had received--justification through faith in the atoning blood of Christ, and the renewing power of the Holy Spirit upon the heart, bringing forth fruit in a life conformed to the example of Christ.

Thus while preaching the gospel of the grace of God, Wesley, like his Master, sought to "magnify the law, and make it honorable." Faithfully did he accomplish the work given him of God, and glorious were the results which he was permitted to behold. At the close of his long life of more than fourscore years--above half a century spent in itinerant ministry--his avowed believers numbered more than half a million souls. But the multitude that through his labors had been lifted from the ruin and degradation of sin to a higher and a purer life, and the number who by his teaching had attained to a deeper and richer experience, will never be known till the whole family of the redeemed shall be gathered into the kingdom of God. His life presents a lesson of priceless worth to every Christian. Would that the faith and humility, the untiring zeal, self-sacrifice, and devotion of this servant of Christ might be reflected in the churches of today!

Law and Grace: In the Christian life, what is the relation of law and grace? What is meant by "not under the law but under grace?" First we need to know, just what is 'grace'? In Christianity the word means undeserved favor, we are given because of God's grace something we did not in any way deserve or earn. In fact we deserved the very opposite.

There Is Only One Way to Be Saved. **"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."** Ephesians 2:8, 9

You cannot earn salvation. You cannot buy it. You can only receive it as a gift. When Jesus Christ died on Calvary all those years ago, He provided salvation for every man, woman and child. But that salvation does you no good until you accept Jesus as your personal Saviour. In that acceptance you realize that He paid the penalty for your sins. Immediately the heavenly Father declares you be justified, as though you had never sinned. This is God's grace.

There are three sides of salvation: past tense, present tense, and future tense.

"Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began." 2 Timothy 1:9. This speaks of salvation as past tense; this is justification. **We are saved.**

Present tense salvation is sanctification: **"For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. Romans 5:10.** We are **being saved.**

Future tense is glorification: **"And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved."** Mark 13:13. We **shall be saved.**

There are three other important matters in regards to salvation that we need to clearly understand.

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(1) We are saved **by** grace.

(2) We are saved **from** sin.

(3) We are saved **to** obey.

"For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid." Romans 6:14, 15.

Sin is "the transgression of the law." 1 John 3:4.

Some try to use Romans 6:14 to prove that there is now no need to keep the Ten Commandments. But a careful reading of verse 15 reveals that God's grace will cause a man to obey His law. Grace is not a license to sin--to break God's law. Grace is the method of salvation. Law is the standard of salvation.

It is like as if a criminal is given a pardon and released from prison, does this mean he is now free to go and do all the crimes he wants? Certainly not! If anything he would be doubly careful not to break the law again!

Grace releases us from the dominion and condemnation of sin.

"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Romans 6:23

The wages of sin is eternal death; the second death. But when you accept Jesus as your Saviour, you are no longer condemned to die that second death. You accept God's grace and have eternal life.

"Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil." Matthew 5:17. These words of Christ are often Misapplied.

Some understand the word *fulfil* to mean "do away with," or "bring to an end." But if I asked you to raise your right hand and you did it, you would have obeyed my request, you would have fulfilled my request. When you fulfil the law of the land it means you are obeying the law!

What Was Nailed to the Cross? Here is another Bible passage which has been misinterpreted, misapplied to escape obedience to the Sabbath and God's holy law.

"Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; and having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it. Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ." Colossians 2:14-17

To the casual reader it sounds as though the Ten Commandments were nailed to the cross, but does it mean this? Notice it says, "the handwriting of ordinances." This brings us face to face with the ceremonial laws, or the laws of ordinances.

Much of the conflict in the early church had to do with these ceremonial laws, the sacrifice of lambs, feasts, and yearly sabbath days. The converts from Judaism to Christianity felt that these ceremonial laws should continue to be followed. The apostle Paul, writing to the

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Romans, Galatians, Corinthians, Ephesians, and Colossians makes it very plain that these ceremonial laws are not to be followed by Christians. These ceremonies only pointed forward to the coming Redeemer--the Lamb of God. Once He died on the cross, they had no further meaning.

The Bible makes it very clear that these "sabbath days which are a shadow of things to come" refer to the seven yearly sabbath days during six annual feasts: (1) the Passover, (2) the Feast of Unleavened Bread; (3) the Feast of Harvest, or the Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost; (4) the Feast of Trumpets; (5) the Day of Atonement; (6) the Feast of Tabernacles. These yearly sabbath days pointed forward to the coming of Christ.

"Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ." Colossians 2:16, 17.

Paul says now that Christ has come and died, all these shadows are finished, they came to an end when Christ died on Calvary's cross. These are the "commandments contained in ordinances" that were nailed to the cross.

God's Ten Commandment Law is even more firmly established since Christ's death on Calvary.

**"Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law."
Romans 3:31**

My faith in Christ's work of grace, His death on Calvary for me, only establishes the law of God more firmly in my heart. If the Law could be done away with then there was no need for Christ to have suffered and died.

"For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." Romans 8:3, 4

The law of God cannot save. It cannot make man right with God. However it can point out sin. If God could have done away with His eternal, moral law, He would have done so rather than to go through the anguish that He did, allowing His only Son to die on Calvary. But this law of unselfish love is a picture of God's character. This law cannot be changed.

Christ did not come to condemn sinners. They were already condemned by the law. He came to save them by condemning sin in the flesh. As people looked at Him, a living representation of the eternal law of God, and listened to Him, they saw the terrible sin in their own lives. They felt condemned when they saw His beautiful, sinless life. When He died to forgive sin, He showed how exceedingly sinful sin is. No one could say that sin is a trifling thing. Because of Jesus' condemnation of sin in the flesh shown by both His life and death, sin is destroyed in the lives of His believers.

One of the major reasons for Christ dying on the cross was for this purpose: **"that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us."** When we walk according to the Spirit, we will want to obey His law through faith! The law was never intended to bring salvation to people. It is an instrument to lead them to Jesus who alone gives salvation!

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The good news is that Jesus transforms people, enabling them by His power to keep the law! Christ's death did not change God's moral law. It is people that Christ is changing. Sin is condemned and put to death in the person's life. The Spirit of Jesus comes in bringing complete forgiveness, restoration, and power to live without sinning.

"But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." Jeremiah 31:33, 34

God says: I will put My law in your heart. I will write it in your mind. I will forgive your sin and I will remember it no more. This is the experience we all need; it comes to us only through God's Amazing Grace!

Balance in faith and works

"Without faith it is impossible to please Him; for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." Hebrews 11:6. There are many in the Christian world who claim that all that is necessary to salvation is to have faith; works are nothing, faith is the only essential. But God's word tells us that faith without works is dead, being alone.

Many refuse to obey God's commandments, yet they talk a great deal of faith. But faith must have a foundation. God's promises are all made upon conditions. If we do His will, if we walk in truth, then we may ask what we will, and it shall be done unto us. While we earnestly endeavor to be obedient, God will hear our petitions; but He will not bless us in disobedience. If we choose to disobey His commandments, we may cry, "Faith, faith, only have faith," and the response will come back from the sure word of God, "Faith without works is dead." Such faith will only be as sounding brass and as a tinkling cymbal.

In order to have the benefits of God's grace, we must do our part; we must faithfully work, and bring forth fruits meet for repentance. We are workers together with God. You are not to sit in indolence, waiting for some great occasion, in order to do a great work for the Master. You are not to neglect the duty that lies directly in your pathway; but you are to improve the little opportunities that open around you. You must go on doing your very best in the smaller works of life, taking up heartily and faithfully the work God's providence has assigned you. However small, you should do it with all the thoroughness with which you would do a larger work. Your faithfulness will be approved in the records of heaven.

You need not wait for your way to be made smooth before you; go to work to improve your entrusted talents. You have nothing to do with what the world will think of you. Let your words, your spirit, your actions, be a living testimony to Jesus, and the Lord will take care that the testimony for His glory, furnished in a well-ordered life and a godly conversation, shall deepen and intensify in power. Its results may never be seen on earth, but they will be made manifest before God and angels.

What is our part? We are to do all that we can do on our part to fight the good fight of faith. We are to wrestle, to labor, to strive, to agonize to enter in at the strait gate. We are to set the Lord ever before us. With clean hands, with pure hearts, we are to seek to honor God in all our

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ways. Help has been provided for us in Him who is mighty to save. The spirit of truth and light will quicken and renew us by its mysterious workings; for all our spiritual improvement comes from God, not from ourselves. The true worker will have divine power to aid him, but the idler will not be sustained by the Spirit of God.

In one way we are thrown upon our own energies; we are to strive earnestly to be zealous and to repent, to cleanse our hands and purify our hearts from every defilement; we are to reach the highest standard, believing that God will help us in our efforts. We must seek if we would find, and seek in faith; we must knock, that the door may be opened unto us. The Bible teaches that everything regarding our salvation depends upon our own course of action. If we perish, the responsibility will rest entirely upon ourselves. If provision has been made, and if we accept God's terms, we may lay hold on eternal life. We must come to Christ in faith, we must be diligent to make our calling and election sure. We dare not have a do-nothing faith.

The forgiveness of sin is promised to him who repents and believes; the crown of life will be the reward of him who is faithful to the end. We may grow in grace by improving through the grace we already have. We are to keep ourselves unspotted from the world, if we would be found blameless in the day of God.

Faith and works go hand in hand, they act together in the work of overcoming. Works without faith are dead, and faith without works is dead. Works will never save us; it is the merit of Christ that will avail in our behalf. Through faith in Him, Christ will make all our imperfect efforts acceptable to God. The faith we are required to have is not a do-nothing faith; saving faith is that which works by love, and purifies the soul. He who will lift up holy hands to God without wrath and doubting, will walk intelligently in the way of God's commandments.

If we are to have pardon for our sins, we must first realize what sin is, that we may repent, and bring forth fruits meet for repentance. We must have a solid foundation for our faith; it must be founded on the Word of God, and its results will be seen in obedience to God's expressed will. Says the apostle, "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord."

Faith and works will keep us evenly balanced, and make us successful in the work of perfecting Christian character. Jesus says, "**Not everyone that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven.**" **Matthew 7:21.**

Speaking of temporal food, the apostle said, "**For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.**" **2 Thessalonians 3:10.** The same rule applies to our spiritual nourishment; if any would have the bread of eternal life, let him make efforts to obtain it.

We are living in an important and interesting period of this earth's history. We need more faith than we have yet had; we need a firmer hold from above. Satan is working with all power to obtain the victory over us, for he knows that he has but a short time in which to work. Paul had fear and trembling in working out his salvation; and should not we fear lest a promise being left us, we should any of us seem to come short of it, and prove ourselves unworthy of eternal life? We should watch unto prayer, strive with agonizing effort to enter in at the strait gate.

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There is no excuse for sin, or indolence. Jesus has led the way, and He wishes us to follow in His steps. He has suffered, He has sacrificed as none of us can, that He might bring salvation within our reach. We need not be discouraged. Jesus came to our world to bring divine power to man, that through His grace, we might be transformed into His likeness.

When it is in the heart to obey God, when efforts are put forth to this end, Jesus accepts this desire and effort as man's best service, and He makes up for the deficiency with His own divine merit. But He will not accept those who claim to have faith in Him, and yet are disloyal to His Father's commandment.

We hear a great deal about faith, but we need to hear a great deal more about works. Many are deceiving their own souls by living an easy-going, accommodating, cross-less religion. But Jesus says, **"If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." Matthew 16:24.**

If we are faithful in doing our part, in cooperating with Him, God will work through us [to do] the good pleasure of His will. But God cannot work through us if we make no effort. If we gain eternal life, we must work, and work earnestly. Let us not be deceived by the oft-repeated assertion, "All you have to do is to believe." Faith and works are two oars in a boat which we must use equally if we press our way up the stream against the current of unbelief. **"Faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone." James 2:17.**

The Christian is a person of thought and practice. Their faith fixes its roots firmly in Christ. By faith and good works they keep spirituality strong and healthy, and their spiritual strength increases as they strive to work the works of God.

Let all be very careful how they present the subject of faith and works before the people, lest minds become confused.

Let no man present the idea that man has little or nothing to do in the great work of overcoming; for God does nothing for man without his cooperation. Neither say that after you have done all you can on your part, Jesus will help you. Christ has said, **"Without Me ye can do nothing." John 15:5.** From first to last man is to be a laborer together with God. Unless the Holy Spirit works upon the human heart, at every step we shall stumble and fall. Man's efforts alone are nothing but worthlessness; but cooperation with Christ means victory.

Never leave the impression on the mind that there is little or nothing to do on the part of man; but rather teach man to cooperate with God, that he may be successful in overcoming.

Effort and labor are required on the part of the receiver of God's grace; for it is the fruit that shows what is the character of the tree. Although the good works of man are of no more value without faith in Jesus than was the offering of Cain, yet covered with the merit of Christ, they testify the worthiness of the doer to inherit eternal life. That which is considered morality in the world does not reach the divine standard.

The perishing sinner may say: "I am a lost sinner; but Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost. He says, **"I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."** Mark 2:17. I am a sinner, and He died upon Calvary's cross to save me. I need not remain a moment

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longer unsaved. He died and rose again for my justification, and He will save me now. I accept the forgiveness He has promised."

He who repents of his sin and accepts the gift of the life of the Son of God, cannot be overcome. Laying hold by faith of the divine nature, he becomes a child of God. He prays, he believes. When tempted and tried, he claims the power that Christ died to give, and overcomes through His grace. This every sinner needs to understand. He must repent of his sin, he must believe in the power of Christ, and accept that power to save and to keep him from sin. How thankful ought we to be for the gift of Christ's example!

We need not worry. A life in Christ is a life of restfulness. There may be no ecstasy of feeling, but there should be an abiding, peaceful trust. Your hope is not in yourself; it is in Christ. Your weakness is united to His strength, your ignorance to His wisdom, your frailty to His enduring might.

We should not make self the center and indulge anxiety and fear as to whether we shall be saved. All this turns the soul away from the Source of our strength. Commit the keeping of your soul to God, and trust in Him. Talk and think of Jesus. Let self be lost in Him. Put away all doubt; dismiss your fears. Say with the apostle Paul, **"I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me."** Galatians 2:20. Rest in God. He is able to keep that which you have committed to Him. If you leave yourself in His hands, He will bring you off more than conqueror through Him that has loved you.

You can count on this; He who through His own atonement provided for man an infinite fund of moral power, will not fail to employ this power for us. In the whole Satanic force there is not power to overcome one soul who in simple trust casts himself on Christ.

Abundant grace has been provided that the believing soul may be kept free from sin. In Him we have a complete offering, an infinite sacrifice, a mighty Saviour, who is able to save unto the uttermost all that come unto God by Him. In love He comes to reveal the Father, to reconcile man to God, to make him a new creature renewed after the image of Him who created him.

The evil that led to Peter's fall in denying Christ at His trial, is proving the ruin of thousands today. There is nothing so offensive to God or so dangerous to the human soul as pride and self-sufficiency. Of all sins it is the most hopeless, the most incurable.

Peter's fall was not sudden, but gradual. Self-confidence led him to the belief that he was saved, and step after step was taken in the downward path, until he could deny his Master. We see his boastful statements at the Last supper, when Jesus tried to warn him of his danger. Never can we safely put confidence in self or feel, this side of heaven, that we can't be tempted.

It is the privilege of the Christian to know that on his acceptance of Christ he is saved from his sins and can rejoice in this salvation. But the scriptures do not support the popular teaching: "once saved, always saved." A person may be saved today, but failing to keep his eyes on Jesus and to grow daily in Him, may become self-confident and be lost tomorrow. The apostle Paul declared, "i die daily," in a sense, conversion is a daily experience.

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Our Lord would have each Christian rejoice freely in salvation, the salvation he enjoys daily. And when asked, "are you saved?" he can with assurance answer 'yes', and will explain that this experience results in constant dependence on God and in daily Christian growth.

Everyone should be taught to cherish hope and faith; but even when we give ourselves to Christ and know that He accepts us, we are not beyond the reach of temptation. God's Word declares, **"Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried." Daniel 12:10.** Only he who endures the trial will receive the crown of life.

Those who accept Christ, and in their self-confidence say, 'I am saved', are in danger of trusting to themselves. They lose sight of their own weakness and their constant need of divine strength. They are unprepared for Satan's tricks, and under temptation many, like Peter, fall into the very depths of sin. We are told, **"Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." 1 Corinthians 10:12.** Our only safety is in constant distrust of self, and dependence on Christ.

There are many who profess Christ, but who never become mature Christians. They admit that man is fallen, that his faculties are weakened, that he is unfitted for moral achievement, but they say that Christ has borne all the burden, all the suffering, all the self-denial, and they are willing to let Him bear it. They say that there is nothing for them to do but to believe; but Christ said, **"If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." Matthew 16:24.** Jesus kept the commandments of God.

We are never to rest in a self-satisfied condition, and cease to advance, as if he could not fall. It is not he that putteth on the armor that can boast of the victory; for he has the battle to fight and the victory to win. It is he that endureth unto the end that shall be saved.

There are both believers and unbelievers in the church. Christ represents these two classes in His parable of the vine and its branches. He exhorts His followers: **"Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in Me. I am the Vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without Me ye can do nothing." John 15:5.**

There is a wide difference between a pretended union and a real connection with Christ by faith. A profession of the truth places men in the church, but this does not prove that they have a connection with the living Vine. A rule is given by which the true disciple may be distinguished from those who claim to follow Christ but have not faith in Him. The one class are fruit bearing, the other, fruitless. The connected ones are often subjected to the pruning knife of God that they may bring forth more fruit; the other, as withered branches, are to be cut from the living Vine.

The fibers of the branch are almost identical with those of the vine. The communication of life, strength, and fruitfulness from the trunk to the branches is unobstructed and constant. The root sends its nourishment through the branch. Such is the true believer's relation to Christ. He abides in Christ and draws his nourishment from Him.

This spiritual relation can be established only by the exercise of personal faith. This faith must express on our part supreme preference, perfect reliance, entire consecration. Our will must be wholly yielded to the divine will, our feelings, desires, interests, and honor identified with the

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prosperity of Christ's kingdom and the honor of His cause, we constantly receiving grace from Him, and Christ accepting gratitude from us.

When this intimate connection and communion is formed, our sins are laid upon Christ; His righteousness is credited to us. He was made sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. We have access to God through Him; we are accepted in the Beloved.

It was when Christ was about to take leave of His disciples that He gave them the beautiful emblem of His relation to believers. He had been presenting before them the close union with Himself by which they could maintain spiritual life when His visible presence was withdrawn. To impress it upon their minds He gave them the vine as its most striking and appropriate symbol. .

All Christ's followers have as deep an interest in this lesson as had the disciples who listened to His words. In the apostasy, man alienated himself from God. The separation is wide and fearful; but Christ has made provision again to connect us with Himself. The power of evil is so identified with human nature that no man can overcome except by union with Christ. Through this union we receive moral and spiritual power. If we have the spirit of Christ we shall bring forth the fruit of righteousness, fruit that will honor and bless others, and glorify God.

The Father is the gardener, He skillfully and mercifully trims every fruit-bearing branch. Those who share Christ's suffering and reproach now will share His glory hereafter. He "is not ashamed to call them brethren." His angels minister to them. His second appearing will be as the Son of man, thus even in His glory identifying Himself with humanity. To those who have united themselves to Him, He declares: "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me." Isaiah 49:15, 16.

Oh, what amazing privileges are offered us! Will we put forth most earnest efforts to form this alliance with Christ, through which alone these blessings are attained? Will we break off our sins by righteousness and our iniquities by turning unto the Lord? Skepticism and infidelity are widespread. Christ asked the question: "**When the Son of man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?**" **Luke 18:8**. We must cherish a living, active faith. The permanence of our faith is the condition of our union.

A union with Christ by living faith is enduring; every other union must perish. Christ first chose us, paying an infinite price for our redemption; and the true believer chooses Christ as first and last and best in everything. But this union costs us something. It is a union of utter dependence, to be entered into by a proud being. All who form this union must feel their need of the atoning blood of Christ. They must have a change of heart. They must submit their own will to the will of God. There will be a struggle with outward and internal obstacles. There must be a painful work of detachment as well as a work of attachment. Pride, selfishness, vanity, worldliness--sin in all its forms--must be overcome if we would enter into a union with Christ. The reason why many find the Christian life so deplorably hard, why they are so fickle, so variable, is that they try to attach themselves to Christ without first detaching themselves from these cherished idols.

Behold the Lamb

After the union with Christ has been formed, it can be preserved only by earnest prayer and untiring effort. We must resist, we must deny, we must conquer self. Through the grace of Christ, by courage, by faith, by watchfulness, we may gain the victory.