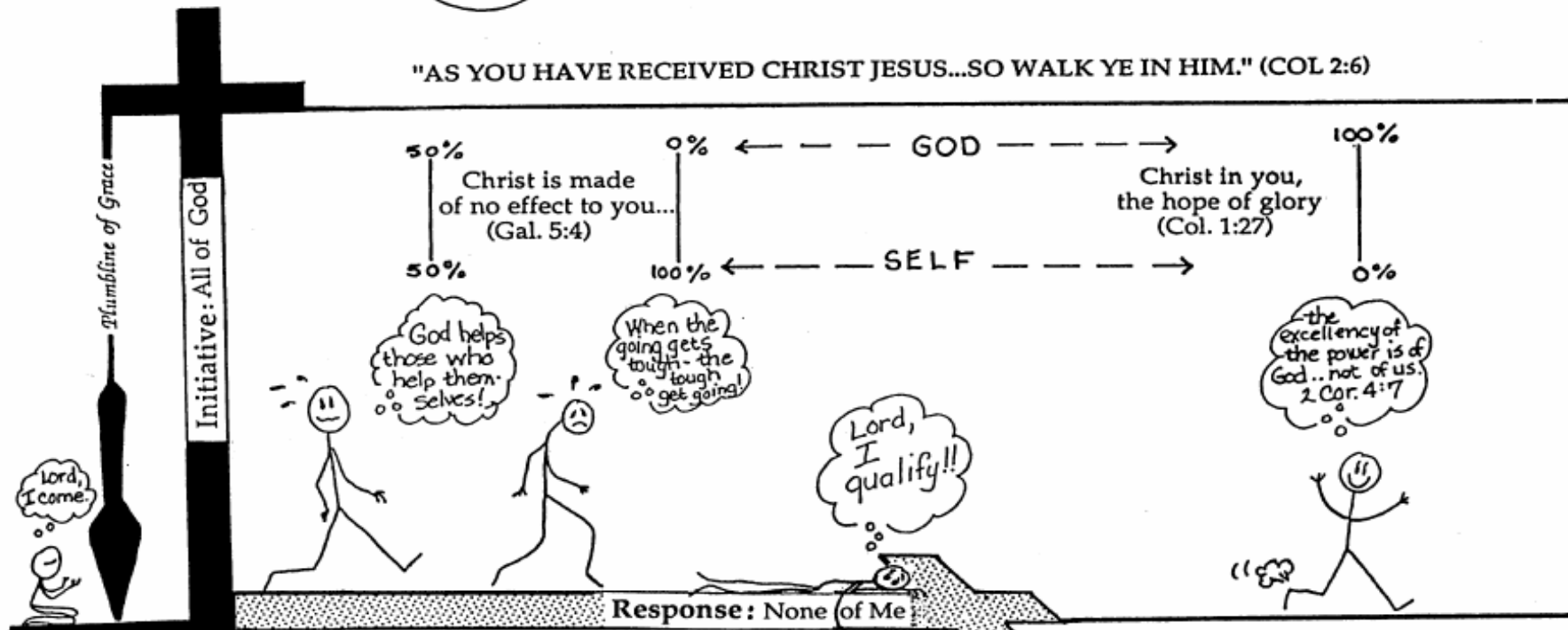


Grace of God

"AS YOU HAVE RECEIVED CHRIST JESUS...SO WALK YE IN HIM." (COL 2:6)



REALIZATION OF SINFULNESS

(Eph. 2:8-9)

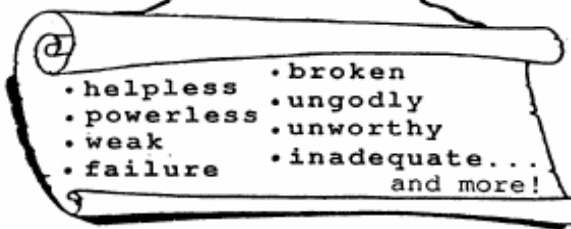
- "The flesh profits nothing..." (John 6:63)
- "In my flesh dwells no good thing." (Rom. 7:18)
- "They that are in the flesh cannot please God." (Rom. 8:8)

"Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit are you now made perfect by the flesh?" (Galatians 3:3)

REALIZATION OF HELPLESSNESS

(Job 5:16)

Nothing in my hands I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling.



REALIZATION OF COMPLETENESS

(Col. 2:9-10)

- "Our sufficiency is of God..." (2 Cor. 3:5)
- "For it is God who works in you both to will and to do..." (Phil. 2:13)
- "I am crucified with Christ...yet not I, but Christ lives in me." (Gal. 2:20)

"My strength is made perfect in weakness...when I am weak then am I strong." (2 Cor. 12:9-10)

Sanctifying Grace

And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work (Rom. 11:6, KJV).

By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God (Rom. 5:2, KJV).

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 (Eph. 2:8-9, KJV).

It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life (John 6:63, KJV).

For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not (Rom. 7:18, KJV).

So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God (Rom. 8:8, KJV).

But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble (James 4:6, KJV). ...for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble (1 Peter 5:5, KJV).

So the helpless has hope, and unrighteousness must shut its mouth (Job 5:16, NASB).

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us (2 Cor. 4:7, KJV).

For in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in Him, which is the head of all principality and power (Col. 2:9,10, KJV).

Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God (2 Cor. 3:5, NIV).

For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure (Phil. 2:13, KJV).

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless 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 (Gal. 2:20, KJV).

To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory: Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus: Whereunto I also labour, striving according to His working, which worketh in me mightily (Col. 1:27-29, KJV).

GRACE for the Rest of Your Life

SANCTIFYING GRACE

SANCTIFYING GRACE (Plumbline): Striving, Failure, Burnout; Performance-Based Acceptance vs. Acceptance-Based Performance; Helplessness Realized; Christ's Life In and Through Us

Striving-Failure-Burnout

This card represents "The Plumbline of Grace." A plumb is a small weight attached to a line and is used by builders to establish the 'vertical.' In our Christian life, we need a "plumbline" to discern truth and expose error. *"For **by grace** are you saved **through faith**, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works lest any man should boast"* (Eph. 2:8-9). This is the salvation message—**by grace through faith**. As we continually refer to God's "plumbline" of "**by grace through faith**," He will keep us from straying from His truth and falling into error. That is the beginning point of our salvation, and the continuing message for sanctification. "...Much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His Life" (Rom. 5:10b).

God's part is the grace initiative; man's part is the faith response. **By grace through faith** we receive "*Christ Who is our Life*" (Col. 3:4). This is **Sanctifying Grace**.

"As you have received Christ Jesus the Lord so walk ye in Him" (Col. 2:6). Our tendency is to add works, or to try to pay God back by serving Him. Instead, we need to keep receiving Him day by day—going to the Lord the first thing in the morning, saying, "Lord, I need You every hour; I need You. I recognize that I cannot live the Christian life on my own." We keep receiving Him moment by moment all through our Christian life—not just for emergencies or crises. *"For from His abundance all of us have received one grace after another"* (Jn. 1:16 BERK). *"But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ"* (2 Pet. 3:18).

Definition of Grace

GRACE is the readily available divine resource
The Person of Christ Himself living His Life through us.
GRACE is activated in our daily lives
As we acknowledge our dependence and need of Him
in every circumstance and relationship.

Let's use the "**Plumbline of Grace**" to discern truth from error in the following:

Look at the first figure on the right side of the cross. He is zealous in his Christian life and he is starting to work up a sweat. Notice the little sweat drops—he is working so hard! The longer he strives, the harder he tries. **"God helps those who help themselves;"** (or "You do your best, and God will do the rest"). He thinks it is fifty-fifty. But, like him, if you have not invited Christ into the equation, *"Christ is become of no effect unto you"* (Gal. 5:4).

Look at the next figure, now bent over. Here is the sweat again, **"When the going gets tough, the tough get going."** He has just taken on the whole responsibility. One hundred

percent! And again, “*Christ is become of no effect unto you*” (Gal. 5:4). He is doing it all on his own!

Another thought sounds like this: “**Pray as though everything is up to God, and work as though everything is up to you.**” That may sound good, but this puts one hundred percent on God and one hundred percent on you—that cannot be. “*And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work*” (Rom. 11:6). It has to be totally Christ. He is the One who is initiating (grace); we are receiving (faith).

Around the world, many dedicated people, with impressive resumes, are working long hours in their full-time Christian ministries. They have good motives, but they are burning out because they are exhausted. They just cannot keep it up any longer. The enemy of our soul takes advantage of this “burned-out” situation and interjects, “Hey, you are just not cut out for this. Why don’t you quit, get a real job and be a normal person? You are not the ministry type. Give it up.”

“*You have wearied yourselves in the multiplicity of your ways*” (Isa. 57:10).

Performance-based Acceptance vs. Acceptance-based Performance

“Performance-based acceptance” is in-bred in our culture. If we perform, we are accepted. But God is different. His is “acceptance-based performance.” He has already accepted us. We serve Him out of a heart that overflows from His love to us (Rom. 5:5).

Notice the fellow laying flat on his face. He feels like a failure and feels disqualified now due to the pressure of performance. For instance, if he was running in an Olympic race, and suddenly tripped and fell, he would hear the whistle blow and a shout, “You’re disqualified!”

But what happens in this picture is that when he falls, his resume unrolls, and this is what we see exposed in his life. He is helpless, powerless, weak, feels like a failure, broken, ungodly, unworthy, inadequate, the list goes on.

Helplessness Realized

We think we are disqualified when we are powerless, helpless, weak, a failure or a “good for nothing.” Picture a pile of resumes stacked on shelves in Heaven. God starts pulling out one at a time. Some resumes list impressive credentials and achievements. God looks at them and says, “No, no, not this one.” Then God unrolls this resume (the scroll on the card) and gets excited, “Hmm, helpless. That is good. Powerless, hmm, good. Weak, getting better all the time. Failure, I could use this one. Broken, I can take care of that. Ungodly, that is who I died for. Unworthy, I am the only One worthy. Inadequate, I am sufficient. **Here is one I can use!**” He is excited! These are the very things that God looks for in a person.

While this little fellow is bemoaning his fate and feeling disqualified, he begins to understand that God is excited about his resume and he exclaims, “Lord, I do qualify! This is great news!” First, there is a **realization of helplessness**, then he sees that he qualifies. Job says, “*The helpless have hope*” (Job 5:16). We usually think when we feel helpless, it is hopeless, but no, “*the helpless have hope!*” This is the good news for Christians.

Now let’s go back to the “plumbline.” When we came to Christ, we realized that we were sinners. Did we become sinners at that time, or were we sinners all along and we just realized it? Which is it? Answer: We were sinners all along, but at a certain point in time each one of us realized that we were sinners.

Let's compare this with the situation of burn-out or exhaustion. You have been working so hard—now you are worn out and feel helpless. Did you just become helpless at that point? Or were you helpless all along? Answer: We were helpless all along. You just realized you were helpless. That is good news! Because if you felt that you just became helpless, you would feel like you were disqualified. But actually you are ahead of some who are still struggling serving Christ, because you have come to that realization sooner. Some people call this the realization card because it is a matter of when we realize the truth—that helplessness (or dependence) is actually your entrance into understanding **Sanctifying Grace**.

**Nothing in my hands I bring
Simply to Thy cross I cling.**

Luke says, “*Everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled*” (Lk. 18:14). Peter learned this the hard way, “*Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time*” (1 Pet. 5:6). Some people choose to call it bankruptcy. It is a state of realization.

After we realize that we qualify by the very things that we think disqualify us, Paul says, “*We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us*” (2 Cor. 4:7). See the power puff by the figure’s foot. The power is of God, not of us (the drops of sweat).

We have exchanged our own efforts for His energy, His strength, His power, and His grace. The phrase “Not of us” reminds us of “*Not of ourselves*” from Ephesians 2:8-9. The same message before we came to Christ (not of ourselves), is also the message after we came to Christ. Not of us! It is still God working in and through us. And this is the mystery that Paul was given by God Himself—the mystery of “*Christ in You, the hope of glory*” (Col 1:27).

Christ’s Life In and Through Us

The following phrase is as if Jesus is speaking: “*I want to take charge of your life. I am willing to wait until you are sure of your utter weakness and helplessness and can look to Me alone for strength and for wisdom.*” (Wm. R. Newell)

It is Christ living His life through us as we yield, as we declare our helplessness and as we come to Him. Now it is one hundred percent Christ, and zero percent us. We are only to yield and let Him use us as His instruments or vessels.

After we have realized we are sinful, after we have realized we are helpless, then we realize we are complete in Him. “*For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in Him...*” (Col. 2:9-10).

We also realize now that our sufficiency and our adequacy is of God, “*For it is God who works in you, both to will [to make us willing], and to do of His good pleasure*” (Phil. 2:13). Then the familiar verse, “*I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless 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*” (Gal. 2:20).

It is a life of responding to the One who gave Himself for us. Paul learned this, “*My strength is made perfect in weakness, for when I am weak then am I strong*” (2 Cor. 12:9-10). The Lord kept the thorn in his flesh to keep Paul recognizing his weakness, because if he did not keep acknowledging his weakness, he would go charging ahead like all good Pauls would do.

“Every element of our own self-reliance must be put to death by the power of God. The moment we recognize our complete weakness and our dependence upon Him, will be the very moment that the Spirit of God will exhibit His power.” (*Oswald Chambers*)

“Our salvation is only by Jesus, our sanctification is only by Jesus, our service is only by Jesus.” (*F.B. Meyer*)

See “Realization of Sinfulness” column of verses (on the left of the visual)

The Apostle John says, “*The flesh profits nothing*” (Jn. 6:63). Isaiah says, “*All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags*” (Isa. 64:6). Paul agrees, “*They that are in the flesh cannot please God*” (Rom. 8:8).

Why do we keep looking for good things in our flesh if there is no good thing? We may think there must be something good, and we search around only to find nothing good. “*In my flesh dwells no good thing*” (Rom. 7:18).

We are not the only ones to have this problem. Paul confronted the Galatians, “*Are you so foolish having begun in the Spirit, are you now made perfect by the flesh?*” (Gal. 3:3). Also to the Corinthians he said, “*But I fear, lest by any means...your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ*” (2 Cor. 11:3).

God is reminding us that we cannot be saved on our own, nor can we live the Christian life on our own. “*God has given unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption*” (1 Cor. 1:30). We know the redemption message by grace. This is the sanctification message by grace.

**When we trust in our own strength,
We get what we can accomplish.
When we trust in God,
We get what He can accomplish.**

“Instead of looking for good men who it may approve, GRACE is looking for condemned, guilty, speechless, and helpless men whom it may save, sanctify, and glorify.” (*Unknown*)

Faith is our response to God’s grace. But the real key is not looking at our faith to see if we have enough faith; it is looking to the Lord **Who is faithful**.

Example of Hudson Taylor’s Life:

Hudson Taylor struggled in his early life of serving Christ. He knew he was very discouraged as a missionary in China, and he knew that if he could just abide in Christ all would be well, but he could not do that. He would begin the day with prayer, determined not to take his eye off the Lord for a moment, but other things came in and before he knew it, he was upset and fretful because of the climate and his irritability. Each day brought its sin and failure and lack of power.

He did not want it to be that way, but that is what he found. He said, “Is there not any way out of this?” “I really hate this, I hate my sin. I am gaining no strength against it.” He knew that he had privileges as a child of God, but he was powerless to get them working in his life. But he finally thought, “I know what it is, it is faith! I just need more faith.” And then the realization, “But I don’t have this faith. I know what I need, but I do not have it.”

He strove for faith, but it would not come. He tried to exercise it, but in vain. He knew God had a lot of power, but he did not know how to tap into that power. He was looking at his own faith (or lack of faith), instead of looking to God, Who is the **faithful One**. When he realized this, his life took on new focus and power.

Concluding Thoughts

This is a very important issue in our lives, because we may have started to think that perhaps we do not have enough faith. Some may encourage us to concentrate on our faith. “If you had more faith, you would not be sick. If you had more faith, you would be healed.” You end up looking at your faith instead of the Lord. However, as we continually look to Him, we find Him more and more precious (see 1 Pet. 2:7). Even when we do not look to Him, we find Him faithful, because He cannot deny Himself (see 2 Tim. 2:13).

Review

I tried.
I tried to believe
That there is no God,
That I could make it on my own,
That all my feeble efforts would suffice
Because they were the best that I could
do.
Once I tried—and failed.

And
I worked.
I worked to be the best that I could be.
I worked to love,
Obey,
Do,
Accomplish.
I worked—and failed.

Then
I heard.
I heard that Jesus is,
That He did it all for me,
That the blood He shed on the Cross
Accomplished my redemption.
Once I heard—and believed.

But
I thought.
I thought that in response to His great love,
I should love,
Obey,
Do,
Accomplish.
And again I failed.

Now
I know.
I know that He lives
In me and through me to do His good work,
That I cannot please God by my feeble efforts,
That I can do nothing
Because His grace alone is sufficient for
everything.
Now I know—and rest.

And fail—and rest again.

by Irene Lewis

Prayer

Lord, we are so thankful for Your **Sanctifying Grace**. We do not have to struggle in our Christian life; we can just rest in Your wonderful grace. May we let Your Lamb-life live through us to others in all our relationships so we can share Your grace. May we share with those around us so that the world may see that Your grace does work in people's lives and draws others to Yourself. As we go forth spreading Your grace from one to another, we know that it will be for Your glory. Send us forth now as Your bell sheep into this world of needy, broken, wounded men and women and young people that they, too, may enjoy You and find You precious. Thank You for Your presence and faithfulness. Thank You that You will never leave us nor forsake us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Review and reinforce this lesson by incorporating the following notes and quotes pages and by reading the Scriptures.

It is Finished

"Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you is justified by the law" Galatians 5:4.

While we are trusting in our own efforts, we are sinners. The more we work and pray, the more we sin.

A group of hungry ones were meeting once a week, and oftener, over a period of months, seeking power for service, but no light came. Suddenly some of their number grasped the truth of perhaps the most precious three words in the Bible: 'It is finished.' No longer need they strive for either victory or power, all was finished. One for about an hour could say nothing but 'Finished'. Another at first wept because although it was finished, she could not praise the Lord because she did not feel it. Later she said: "I wanted to feel before I said 'Finished', but whether I feel it or not, it IS done, it can't be done-er, and it can't be undone." Whether I understand it or not, it IS done, whether I believe it or not, it IS done. No feelings can add anything, no lack of feelings can take anything away. It IS finished. 'He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified' (Hebrews 10:14).

Anonymous

*Less, less of self each day
And more, my God, of Thee;
Oh, keep me in thy way,
However rough it be.*

*Less of the flesh each day,
Less of the world and sin;
More of thy love, I pray,
More of Thyself within.*

*More moulded to Thy will,
Lord, let Thy servant be;
Higher and higher still –
Nearer and nearer Thee.*

Author Unknown



"There is no hope for any of us until we confess our helplessness. Then we are in a position to receive grace. There we have the 'terms': GRACE – first, last, and always, so long as we see ourselves as competent, we do not qualify."

Elisabeth Elliot

Lonliness

"Though man has rebelled against God, he has never established his independence. He is still dependent upon God, but unwilling to acknowledge it." Strombeck



**Helplessness is our greatest
source of strength –
If you live on your knees,
Your life won't be
explainable.**

Charles Stanley

Lord, I Relinquish to You My Strength

Lord, I have given you my fears and cares
Just as you directed me.
My fears keep me seeking your strength;
My frailties keep me seeking Your wisdom.
These things I understand.

But something tells me I need to offer you my strength.
For when my world begins to crumble and when my hopes lay
smashed
Strength seduces me, saying;
I can handle it; I can face anything; when the going gets tough, the
tough get going.'
This strength keeps me going, sometimes even smiling, but
This strength keeps me from You.
For I cannot take your hand while clutching my shield.

So I offer you this shield – my plucky little man-made strength.
I lay it at your feet.
I step over it and now, unhampered, I can stretch out my hand to
Yours.
I will lay down this shield for now, though sometime I may forget
and pick it up again.
While I am here with you, it is not my friend.
Lord, I relinquish to you my strength.

Deanna Hutchings

Get on your knees and fight like a man!

“Weakness is the strength which keeps us in Christ.”

G. C. Morgan

E. Herman says this about humility: “We all tend to be infatuated with the idea of strength – but we fail to realize that all true strength is grounded in humility. We still relegate humility to the pale ranks of passive virtues and ornamental graces, whereas in its legitimate development, it is a stout and soldierly quality. Humility, indeed, is simply a sense of reality and proportion. It is grounded upon a knowledge of the truth about ourselves and about God. ‘The reason why God is so great a lover of humility,’ says St. Vincent de Paul, ‘is because he is the great Lover of Truth. Now humility is nothing but truth, whilst pride is nothing but lying.’”

Elisabeth Elliot *The Mark of a Man*

Our very strength is our greatest weakness, because overconfidence in our strength leads to our downfall. We are afraid of our weaknesses and guard against them. But we take chances with our strength, and that is where we lose.

“Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (1 Corinthians 10:12).

Charles Allen

When you get so tired of running your own life by yourself and doing it your way and figuring out all the answers with no one to help; when trying to accumulate, hold, grasp, and keep everything together in your own strength gets to be too big a load; when you begin to realize that by yourself you’re never going to be able to fulfill your dreams, I hope you’ll remember that it doesn’t have to be that way at all – you have been invited “to share in the very being of God.” Not commanded to give up and die or to be beaten to your knees, but to “share in His life and love and grace.”

It is a relationship that does not grow out of fear; it comes about as we sense our need and His infinite resources; it happens as we are moved by gratitude and love.

Bob Benson *Come Share the Being*

A Soldier’s Prayer

*“I asked God for strength that I might achieve.
I was made weak that I might learn humbly to obey.*

*I asked God for health that I might do better things.
I was given infirmity that I might do better things.*

*I asked for riches that I might be happy.
I was given poverty that I might be wise.*

*I asked for power that I might have the praise of men.
I was given weakness that I might feel the need of God.*

*I asked for all things that I might enjoy life.
I was given life that I might enjoy all things.*

*I got nothing I asked for
But everything I had hoped for...*

*Almost despite myself my unspoken prayers were answered.
I am among men most richly blessed.”*

Unknown



**It is not our littleness
That hinders Christ,
But our bigness:**

**It is not our weakness
That hinders Christ,
It is our strength
Spurgeon**

Sanctifying Grace

“Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will *do it.*’ The One who calls you to a life of righteousness is the One who by your consent lives that life of righteousness *through you.*”

Major Ian Thomas
The Saving Life of Christ

“By submissive trust we entered, at our spiritual new birth... beneath the blessed [refuge] of Justification; and there we abide and remain, never to venture from beneath it for one moment to the end; never to step out on to the forbidden and fatal ground of acceptance for our works’ sake, for our state’s sake. And now, meantime, by the same way, by submissive trust, we who dwell beneath that [refuge] are to gather up there this great treasure of power and peace. He who is our justifying and imputed Righteousness is also, by His Spirit, our sanctifying and inherent Life; and it is faith, mere and simple faith, submissive trust, that receives and feeds on Him as such. To His life and victory, to His holy fullness, we unite ourselves by faith, and by faith alone.”

H. C. G. Moule
Thoughts on the Spiritual Life

“And now just as you trusted Christ to save you, trust Him, too, for each day’s problems; live in vital union with Him” (Colossians 2:6).

The Living Bible

“Believers often manage to trust God for truths they need, only to slip from grace into the legal realm in seeking to produce the particular truth in their life or service. Once in possession of a truth, we are to rest – He will produce. ‘In actual experience, when we have apprehended our deliverance through death with Christ, the self-life often appears more alive than ever! Just here God would have us stand firm (rest) upon His written Word. The increasing revelation proves the surrender to the cross to be real, because the Holy Spirit takes us at our word, and reveals all that He has seen lying underneath – reveals it that it may be dealt with at the cross. Our part is to yield our wills, and take God’s side against ourselves, whilst the Holy Spirit applies the death of the cross to all that is contrary to Him, that it may be really true that we who are of Christ have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts (Galatians 5:24).”

Evan Hopkins

One day we came to Him in utter need and reliance, and received life. Every day we are to abide in Him in utter need and reliance, that He may live that life in and through us. We are born again by faith, and we are to live anew by faith. “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).

Miles Stanford
The Complete Green Letters

There are earnest Christians who know not that the life of grace is always and only a life of faith, and that in the relationship to the Lord Jesus the one daily and unceasing duty of the disciple is *to believe*, because believing is the one channel through which Divine grace and strength can flow into the heart of man. The old nature of the believer remains evil and sinful to the last; it is only as he daily comes, all empty and helpless, to his Savior to receive of His life and strength, that he can bring forth the fruits of righteousness to the glory of God.”

Andrew Murray

Burned-Out Believers

By Malcolm Smith

In the last few years, we have all become familiar with the secular term “burnout”. It describes a condition that overtakes the successful – those who have striven for excellence in their fields. People engaged in helping their fellow man – the social worker, the counselor, the religious – experience the highest incidence of burnout.

The essence of burnout is the firsthand discovery of what the Bible calls “death” (separation from God). The Scriptures teach that man was created for the specific purpose of living out, on this planet, a vital union with his Creator. To know meaning in his life, he must know God as his friend and live in an existential union with Him. When man chose to be independent from God, he died in his spirit. Separated from God, he had no foundational purpose in life; nothing he did gave him the meaning he craved.

Living From the Source

In this state, man discovers an emptiness within that cannot be filled with any kind of success as defined by man’s mind. Eventually, he drops exhausted on the side of the road of life... burned out.

Only in vital union with his Creator does man not burn out, for then he is living from the Source of life. The Person who is life is living in him and through him. It is through the death, resurrection and exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ that we are pardoned and returned to this union for which we were originally made.

No Greater Despair

That being the case, we would expect those who have believed upon the Lord Jesus to be immune from burnout. Instead, we see them experiencing a type of burnout even worse than that found in the world.

There is no burnout as total as spiritual burnout. Secular burnout is the failure to find meaning in human goals. But believers set out on a journey bright with hope in divine promises, believing they have found that elusive purpose and the joy that goes with it. There is no greater despair than that of a believer when the promises of the gospel appear to have popped like soap bubbles. Or when promises of liberty have produced more bondage and a greater sense of slavery than anything experienced in the world. The result is spiritual exhaustion – believers filling the pews on Sunday morning, tired from their efforts to please and walk with God.

A growing number of pastors are aware of the disillusionment in their congregations but do not have an answer. Tragically, many of them handle their own failing lives by raging at their congregations over the sin for which they themselves have no answer.

This is a matter for wonder and amazement. The Gospel is the power of God that brings us to salvation, yet here are believers finding that they are exhausted. We must face the fact that a Gospel that produces a sense of futility in those who are trying to achieve the normal Christian life is no Gospel at all.

The incidence of spiritual exhaustion and burnout among us today is in direct proportion to the proliferation of a message preached in the last few years as the Gospel that, in fact, has missed the very heart of the Good News.

Incapable of Seeing

In understanding the true Gospel, it is important to note that Jesus was born into a society ruled by a sect of Judaism that had lost its roots in the Scripture, the people known as the Pharisees. They had distorted the truth of God into a system of laws, codes, formulas and empty rituals through which they thought to make themselves acceptable to God.

Without the Spirit, they interpreted the Law through their natural minds. They were incapable of seeing the heart of the Scripture they searched so diligently, which was to love God and one's neighbor. They defined holiness in terms of what they did not do, the places they did not frequent and the people with whom they did not associate. Their self-image, was expressed as "...I thank Thee, that I am not like other people" (Luke 18:11).

Most Israelites in the time of Jesus labored under suffocating interpretation of the Scripture. Walking with God was understood as a constant performance before Him, an hour-by-hour checking to be sure that all was being done correctly. To enter such a life, one was called to "come under the yoke of the Law" – and a heavy chafing wearying yoke it was! The people became tired, bored and disillusioned. If this is what the Scriptures called living, the common folk of Israel didn't think much of it!

It was to these people that Jesus came and spoke His promises of salvation that had come to man in Him. He not only announced and defined the Good News, but He explained it in contrast to the prevailing religious bondage. He didn't come with new formulas and codes or better rules. He came to abolish religion. It was in the context that He said: "Come to Me all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My load is light" (Matthew 11:28-30).

He addresses a people who are weary with their efforts to translate the revelation of God into their daily lifestyle. He calls them to leave the yoke they are under, the yoke of the pharisaical Law, come to Him and take His yoke. Leaving the codes, formulas and laws of religion and finding their life in Him, they would find rest of heart. The word "rest" in the Greek literally means "vacation time" – thus a ceasing from works. In this case, it mean the works I would do in any given moment of our life.

In the last 50 years there has been a blurring of the Gospel, especially in the evangelical and pentecostal communities. No one set out deliberately to adulterate the Gospel. If we read their doctrinal statements, we see these communities exalt the person of the Lord Jesus. It is in the working out of the Christian life that the Gospel has been mixed with pharisaism, thus making it something other than the Gospel. Sincere men have done it by erecting laws, rules and disciplines in an effort to achieve a godly life, not realizing that they were creating a human substitute for the life and holiness of love that is found only in the person of Jesus himself.

Wherever the Christian lifestyle is defined in terms of rules, there is exhaustion, weariness and spiritual burnout.

The inevitable result of trying to please God by what I do or do not do is to become weary under the heavy load. It is to miss the purpose for which man was created: to contain, live and express the life of Another in every choice I make, in every situation. Even though we have believed upon the Lord Jesus, until we are living from His life in each situation, we still have not come to see what it means to pass from death to life.

The inevitable results of the Gospel, on the other hand, is **rest** – walking through life in the exhilarating joy and peace that comes with having found the purpose for which we are created.

Paul summed up the Gospel in the words, "For to me, to live is Christ..." (Philippians 1:21), and "... it is no longer I who live. But Christ lives in me..." (Galatians 2:20).

If we miss the fact that He Himself is the way, the truth and the life, we construct a religion from His words and add rules based on our interpretation of His words. There is no exhaustion like that of a believer who has glimpsed the life, rest and joy that is in Christ and then been suffocated by religious rules.

For this reason, Paul emphasizes that the resurrection of Jesus is the foundation of our faith: "And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain... and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins" (1 Corinthians 15:14, 17).

The Gift is Christ

Our faith hinges on the fact that He is alive and living within the believer by His Spirit, the Source of the lifestyle that we call Christian. The believer's life is therefore called "the fruit of the Spirit..." (Galatians 5:22), rather than the result of dedication and struggle to achieve compliance with a religious law—even God's Law.

God gifts us with Jesus Christ, and through Him and His shed blood we are accepted, pardoned for all our sins and declared the righteousness of God.

But we must understand that the gift reaches far beyond God's act of pardon. The gift is Christ Himself and, from the moment we call upon Him for salvation, He becomes our life, to live His life through ours.

That life is love, and God is love, and so living has been reduced to its utmost simplicity: "... love one another, even as I have loved you..." (John 13:34). An impossible command until, in union with Christ, we are in union with Love. This produces a life that fulfills the requirements of the Law, and goes far beyond them (Romans 8:3-4).

For example, the Law said we must not kill, but the Christ who lives within us expresses love for His enemies that goes as far as dying for them – a far cry from killing them!

Paul puts it plainly in Galatians 5:14: "For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"

The believer is a completely new self, a new creation. Christ is His life, his desires and the "want to" in his new heart. He no longer wants sin; he has seen the futility of the world for what it is. He wants to love his brother and neighbor, not just as himself but as Christ loved him. Of course, he is tempted to return to the old lifestyle, but at no time does he want to return to his separation from God. It is a temptation because it comes from the outside; it is no longer the desire of his true self, which is in union with Christ.

When a believer momentarily forgets who he is in Christ and falls into sin, his true self is seen in expressing great sorrow for the sin and a desire to turn from it and receive forgiveness. He quickly receives cleansing and goes on his way rejoicing that he is truly a new person and not of the world.

This is the rest Jesus promised. It is not the struggle of the creature to become more and more like Jesus. We learn to rejoice in our felt weaknesses and move immediately to Christ, our true life. We celebrate our creaturehood by exchanging our human weakness for His strength.

The heresy that is producing thousands of burned out believers today is described in Paul's letter to the Galatians. It is the message that offers pardon and acceptance through Christ, but then demands the achieving of a life pleasing to God by obedience to rules and laws. That is returning to the meaninglessness, from which Jesus came to save us! "...if righteousness come through the Law, then Christ died needlessly" (Galatians 2:21).

Rejection of Works

Many activities (pray more, spend more time alone with God, memorize more scripture) are being tossed into the arena as answers to spiritual burnout, but most become rules like the ones that caused the problem in the first place. These activities will not produce life – Christ's life living in us. After the guilt that legalism produces is removed, we spend time with God because we want to, pray because it is a necessary joy, thirst for Scripture because it is the Word of God to our hearts.

The answer to spiritual burnout is to return to the living Jesus Himself and the grace of God that comes to us moment by moment through Him. This is a rejection of our trust in works and rules and "yes" to the Spirit of Christ living in and through our mortal flesh. Such a believer can neither burn out nor become exhausted in his spirit, for he is fueled by Jesus who is the resurrection and the life.