



GRACE / THE DOCTRINE OF THE SCRIPTURES

Grace, Works, and Lordship

We are saved by grace, not by works. But what part do our works have in this life we live before God? Dave Bovenmyer explores this critical issue of grace, works, and Lordship of Jesus Christ.



Grace, Works, and Lordship

Pastor Dave Bovenmyer · Ames, IA

1. What verses teach that salvation is by grace and not by works?

The GCC statement of faith says: “Men and women are freed from the penalty for their sins not as a result, in whole or in part, of their own works, goodness or religious ceremony, but by the undeserved favor of God alone. God declares righteous all who put their faith in Christ alone for their salvation.”

The truth that we are reconciled to God by the grace and mercy of God and not by our good works is taught all throughout the New Testament--in the Gospels, the Book of Acts and in the Epistles.

In the Gospels, we see that, surprisingly, Jesus’ chief enemies were not flagrant sinners, but those who claimed to be righteous. By and large, the Pharisees did demonstrate a greater zeal for God and for righteousness than the average Jew, yet they were not saved. On the other hand, many of Jesus’ closest friends were tax collectors, former prostitutes, and other sinners. Jesus demonstrated an incredible acceptance of repentant sinners. For example, He defended and forgave a woman caught in the very act of adultery (John 8:2-11). And He welcomed a woman who had a sinful life and let her wash His feet with her tears, kiss them, and wipe them with her hair (Luke 7:36-39). He won Zacchaeus through His acceptance in spite of the sinful, greedy life Zacchaeus had led. And He chose Levi, a former tax collector as one of his apostles. Certainly, none of these folks were saved by their own righteousness.

Jesus’ teaching agreed with His practice. In response to accusations that He was hanging out with undesirable types, He said that it is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. He said that He had not come to call the righteous, but sinners (Matthew 9:13). He told the story of two men who came to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee thanked God that he was not like other men- robbers, evildoers, adulterers. But the tax collector would not even lift up his eyes to Heaven, but beat his breast and said, “*God, have mercy on me, a sinner.*” Jesus concluded His story with the statement, “*I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted*” (Luke 18:10-14). And in Luke 15, again in response to accusations that He welcomed sinners, Jesus gave us perhaps the most powerful statement in the scripture of God’s grace and forgiving attitude toward sinners-the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son.

The Book of Acts also teaches that salvation is by grace through faith, not by works of righteousness or works of the law.

“Jesus Christ never died for our good works. They were not worth dying for. But He gave Himself for our sins, according to the Scriptures.”

- Martin Luther

“Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:38-39).

“God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them (the first Gentiles to be saved) by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke (the Law of Moses) that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are” (Acts 15:8- 11).

“All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name” (Acts 10:43).

“He then brought them out and asked, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’ They replied, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved-you and your household’” (Acts 16:30-31).

The epistles, as well, clearly and powerfully teach that salvation is by grace, through faith, not by works of righteousness. The following verses are a sampling of verses in the Epistles that teach salvation by grace through faith. They are extremely clear, so I will not comment upon them, other than to highlight some phrases.

“At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived, and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. 4But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, 5he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, 6whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:3- 7).

“But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions-it is by grace you have been saved. . . And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 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. 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 2:4-9).

“Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood” (Romans 3:20-25).

“Grace is the good pleasure of God that inclines Him to bestow benefits upon the undeserving.... Its use to us sinful men is to save us and make us sit together in heavenly places to demonstrate to the ages the exceeding riches of God’s kindness to us in Christ Jesus.”

-A.W.Tozer

“For grace is given not because we have done good works, but in order that we may be able to do them.”

- Augustine

“What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about- but not before God. What does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.’ Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness” (Romans 4:1-5).

“Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham’s offspring-not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all” (Romans 4:16).

“For if, by the trespass of the one man (Adam), death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:17).

“It [God’s salvation] does not, therefore, depend on man’s desire or effort, but on God’s mercy” (Romans 9:16).

“What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the ‘stumbling stone.’ As it is written: ‘See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.’ Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness. Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes” (Romans 9:30-10:4).

From the Epistles, many other verses teaching salvation by grace through faith apart from works could be added to these—from Colossians, Hebrews, 1 Peter, and almost the entire book of Galatians.

2. Certainly the Scriptures teach that we are saved by faith. But surely some good works couldn’t hurt?

Is not salvation a combination of faith and works?

By definition, grace is unmerited favor. As we have seen in so many verses, salvation is an unmerited gift, received by faith. If conditions other than faith are required, then salvation is no longer free. Paul states this clearly in Romans 11:6, *“And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.”*

3. But doesn’t James 2 teach that we are justified by works and not faith alone? How can this be reconciled with the many verses that teach salvation by faith alone?

Like most words the Greek word translated “work” has various meanings. In the context of the verses just quoted from several of Paul’s letters, it is used in the sense of works of the law or works of righ-

teousness. In these verses, the term is referring to deeds done by a person in an effort to establish his own self-righteousness or to achieve salvation. The term is not referring to any and every act or decision that a human being could make. This is clear because the term is contrasted with the word “faith” or “believe.” Yet believing is something that a person does. Faith is an act, a choice, made by a person. Yet it is not a “work” in the sense that Paul is using the term—an attempt to establish our own goodness or self-righteousness or to gain salvation through our own merit. Rather, faith is just the opposite. It is an abandonment of any trust in our own self-righteousness and self-effort and a trust in the work of Christ as the sole means of justification. Yet faith is still something that we do.

James, in chapter two of his epistle uses the same word “works” as Paul, yet he is using it in a different sense than Paul was in the verses quoted above. Let’s look at what James wrote:

“What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, ‘Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, ‘You have faith; I have deeds. Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do.’ You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder. You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the scripture was fulfilled that says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,’ and he was called God’s friend. You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone” (James 2:14-24).

Right off the bat, we see that the issue in James’ mind was the genuineness of faith - “*If a man claims to have faith.*” James is talking about deeds (throughout the passage he uses the same word “works” that Paul used) that are an evidence of faith, not about works of righteousness done to obtain salvation through self effort. He is saying that faith, without any accompanying deeds, is not true faith at all, “*Can such faith save him?*” Notice that the examples of Abraham and Rahab that James points to are not works that were done in an effort to achieve self-righteousness or to gain justification through good works. Abraham was commended for being willing to kill his own son, hardly a work of self-righteousness. Rather, Abraham’s “work” was an action that was a direct result of faith—a work of faith.

Rahab lied and deceived and was disloyal to her countrymen, again hardly the kind of deeds someone would do in an attempt to become more righteous or to be justified before God through personal righteousness. Certainly Rahab was not justified by her upstanding moral life (she was a prostitute), but by her faith. And hiding the spies was an action that was a direct result of her faith. James’ conclusion is that “a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone,” must be understood in the context of his argument. His whole point is that genuine faith will result in deeds that evidence that faith. He is not arguing that our own works or deeds achieve or help achieve our salvation or that we should trust in them as a basis for our salvation. Rather, they are evidences that our faith is genuine. Salvation is

“What is said in the passage [James 2:14 ff.] is like a two coupon train or bus ticket. One coupon says, ‘Not good if detached’ and the other says, ‘Not good for passage.’ Works are not good for passage; but faith detached from works is not saving faith.”

- Charles C. Ryrie

"I charge you by the concern we bear for one another's souls and by the love of God that you warn and exhort me with patience if you see in me those turnings back of heart that I do not perceive in the blindness of my flesh."

- Jim Elliot

by faith alone, yet God is the only one who knows with absolute certainty whether a person has truly believed. To the rest of us, our actions demonstrate whether our faith is genuine or not.

Other New Testament writers agree with James. In Acts 26:20, Paul stated: *"First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds."* John the Baptist challenged his listeners to, *"Produce fruit in keeping with repentance"* (Matthew 3:8). And Jesus stated, *"By their fruit you will recognize them"* (Matthew 7:16). Many other verses teach this same truth.

4. Salvation is by grace through faith apart from works. Yet deeds of faith are necessary evidences of genuine faith. How do we keep these two issues straight when preaching the gospel? In particular, what about the contemporary issue of "Lordship Salvation?" Must we emphasize the Lordship of Christ?

The remainder of this article is a paper I wrote several years ago in an attempt to help reconcile differences within our movement on the issue of "Lordship Salvation." It was written after much input and interaction from the movement's pastors.

Lordship Salvation. When discussing "Lordship Salvation" and "Easy Believism," several issues come to mind - 1) Does a person have to acknowledge Jesus as his personal Lord, or can he first accept Jesus as Savior and later as Lord? 2) Is it necessary to "repent" to be saved? 3) What works are necessary to evidence salvation? 4) What place does the law have in evangelism? 5) Should we preach the "discipleship" verses in our evangelism?

Jesus as Lord. The issue behind the first question is not simply, "must we acknowledge Jesus as Lord," but also "must we acknowledge that God is our Lord?" Obedience to Christ and obedience to God the Father are synonymous, since the Son never does anything on His own initiative or apart from the Father (John 8:28). So there is a broader question that I believe is the real issue: Must a person acknowledge that God is Lord and that he is responsible to submit to Him as Lord?

I believe that the answer is an emphatic "Yes!" It is impossible for someone to truly accept Christ as Savior and not as Lord.

1. God our creator is "The only Sovereign" and "Lord of all." If a person does not accept and believe that God has the right to command his personal obedience, he does not believe in the true God, but a lesser God of his own invention who does not require such accountability.
2. If someone does not believe that God is to be obeyed as Lord, he does not understand or believe in sin, since sin, at its root, is disobedience to the commands of God.
3. If someone does not believe in sin, he does not believe that there will be judgment for sin. Neither will he believe in salvation, nor see any need for it.

Needless to say, a person who does not believe in the true God, does not believe in sin, does not believe in judgment, and does not believe he needs salvation cannot be saved until these beliefs are changed. He may say a prayer to ask Jesus into his life, but he cannot be saved without understanding, believing, and accepting that God and Christ are Lord, that he has rebelled against that Lordship by disobeying

God, that God will judge him for his disobedience, and that Christ took this judgment in his place.

So it seems obvious that for us to accept Christ as Savior, we must first acknowledge and accept that He is Lord. Otherwise what are we being saved from? If God and Christ are not Lord, then we need no Savior. Accepting Christ as Savior predisposes accepting God and Christ as Lord and as our Lord. Accepting that God and Christ are Lord is a prerequisite to accepting Him as Savior. If, however, we change the question from “must a person acknowledge Christ as Lord” to “must a person make Christ his Lord”-and by this we mean that a person must stop sinning or clean up his life or become more righteous before God will accept him-then the answer is an emphatic “no.” Christ did not come to call the righteous, but sinners (Matthew 9:13). God credits righteousness, not to the man who works, but to the man who “*does not work, but trusts God who justifies the wicked*” (Romans 4:5, NIV). We must be careful not to add any conditions to God’s grace; otherwise we will nullify God’s grace (Romans 11:6).

Must a person desire or want God and Christ to be his Lord? It would seem that he must, in the sense of accepting and yielding to the fact that God and Christ are Lord and his personal Lord. However, in some cases, people may do so reluctantly or even grudgingly at first. To be born again, a person need not comprehend the full extent of His lordship, or yield to His lordship in “all areas of life.” In reality, it is impossible to yield to Christ’s lordship in all areas of life at any particular point in time. Such yielding can only occur at the points in life where obedience is required. Submission to Christ is not a once-for-all experience, but a lifelong activity. The Lordship of Christ is something that is not discovered and yielded to once, but thousands of times. It must be renewed every day in many acts of trust and obedience.

Often a believer will come to a point in life where he comes under deep conviction in certain areas of life and decides to surrender himself “totally” to the Lord. All of us, as we grow in our faith, discover areas in which the Lord is asking for obedience that prior to that time we had no idea He would demand. Or we find ourselves resisting God even in a familiar command and must again decide to yield to His Lordship. Such yielding can produce a peace and fruit beyond anything we had previously known. But a fuller understanding and fuller yielding to Christ’s lordship does not necessarily mean that Christ was not our Lord prior to that point, no matter how dramatic it may be. It is wrong to conclude that we first accepted Christ as Savior and then later as Lord-as we have seen, that is impossible. Rather, we came to more fully comprehend the extent of His Lordship and yielded to that Lordship in a greater way than we ever had before.

Repentance. If repentance, at its root, means a change of mind and a turning from an old way of thinking (and resultant actions) to a new way of thinking (and resultant actions), then it is impossible to be saved without it. Believing in Christ always involves a change of mind. In some cases, people will need to repent of worshipping idols rather than the true God, as Paul exhorted the Athenians to do in Acts 17. In Acts 2, Peter exhorted the first-century Jews to repent of their rejecting and crucifying the Messiah.

“Cheap grace is the idea that ‘grace’ did it all for me so I do not need to change my lifestyle. The believer who accepts the idea of ‘cheap grace’ thinks he can continue to live like the rest of the world. Instead of following Christ in a radical way, the Christian lost in cheap grace thinks he can simply enjoy the consolations of his grace.”

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer

***“People who are crucified with Christ have three distinct marks:
1. They are facing only one direction,
2. They can never turn back, and
3. They no longer have plans of their own.”***

-A.W. Tozer

It would seem that a primary work of the evangelist would be to discern what it is for which a person needs to repent and exhort them to do so. In some cases, they may need to repent about their false concept of God. In other cases people may already understand that God and Christ are Lord and that they have violated that Lordship, but the area in which they need to repent is trusting in their own works for salvation, rather than in the finished work of Christ. Many Jews and Pharisees were in this category. They acknowledged the Lordship of God, but they needed to repent of their self-righteousness and of trusting in their own works for salvation and needed to trust in Christ, God’s provision for their sin.

We need to be skilled in ascertaining in what area a person needs to repent. It would seem that at some point, everyone must repent of their attitude of rebellion and disobedience to God. Yet in some cases, the evangelist will find that a person has already repented of his sinful disobedience, and in fact is sick and tired of sin and desperately wants to be free from sin. Take for example Martin Luther or John Wesley. Both detested their sin and were desperate for change. The area that they needed to repent in was trusting in their own efforts instead of Christ’s.

Repentance is a broader concept than is commonly supposed and it is the job of the evangelist to ascertain where a person needs repentance and to exhort him to repent (change his mind) in that area.

When sharing the gospel, if we use the word “repentance,” we should be careful to define it, especially since some might view repentance as a cleansing of our life from sin prior to salvation.

Evidence of salvation. Genuine faith and repentance will always result in a change of life and a change of actions. John the Baptist warned the Pharisees and Sadducees that their repentance was not genuine, since it had not produced fruit, saying, “*bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance*” (Matthew 3:8, KJV).

In Matthew 7:15-23, Jesus gave us instruction on how to discern a true prophet from a false one, and that instruction had to do with the fruit of the person’s life. Then He went on to give us a means of confirming our own salvation. Many will think they are right with God, but only those who do the “will of the Father” and are not “evildoers” are truly right with God.

The Apostle John gives much instruction about how we can know that we ourselves and others are truly born of God. These include:

- Obeying His commands (I John 2:3)
- Obeying His word (I John 2:5)
- Walking as Jesus walked (I John 2:6)
- Loving our brothers and not hating them (I John 2:9-11)
- Not continuing to sin (I John 3:5-10)
- Doing what is right (I John 3:10)
- Loving our brother (I John 4:7-8)

Doing these things does not gain salvation for anyone, but they are given by John as evidences of salvation.

Paul also teaches that deeds are a result and evidence of genuine faith:

“The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires” (Galatians 5:19-24).

“For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God’s wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore do not be partners with them. For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord” (Ephesians 5:5-10, NIV).

“Do YOU not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Corinthians 6:9-11, NIV).

The question arises, “How much fruit must a person display before we can be certain he has believed?” In Matthew 13:23, Jesus said that some who believed would produce more fruit than others, “*He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.*”

But we cannot necessarily conclude that someone who claims to be a believer is not really born again simply because they sin a lot. The Corinthian church was filled with all kinds of worldliness, jealousy, arguments, immorality, self-exaltation, etc. Some were weak and sick and some had even died because they were partaking of the Lord’s supper with drunkenness, selfishness, and strife. Yet, Paul saw this as the Lord’s discipline upon believers and said that those who had died had “fallen asleep”—his term for the death of a believer.

Yet, in 2 Corinthians, Paul was concerned that some of the Corinthians had perhaps not yet repented of their “quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder.” He then exhorts them: “*Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test*” (2 Corinthians 13:5)? With a continued lack of change, Paul was beginning to have doubts about whether some of them were really born again.

“That is why He warned people to ‘count the cost’ before becoming Christians. ‘Make no mistake,’ He says, ‘if you let me, I will make you perfect. The moment you put yourself in My hands, that is what you are in for. Nothing less, or other than that.’”

- C.S. Lewis

Perhaps our conclusion should be that the more fruit someone demonstrates, the more confident we can be that their faith is genuine. If someone is flagrantly sinning and demonstrates little fruit of righteousness, we would certainly have reason to doubt their salvation. And if they continue to sin for a long period of time or if they do not demonstrate a love for God or His people, we could legitimately conclude that they most likely were never born again.

The place of the law in evangelism. The law has a valuable function in evangelism:

- “...through the law we become conscious of sin” (Romans 3:20).
- “...I would not have known what sin was except through the law” (Romans 7:7).
- “[The law came] that sin might be recognized as sin” (Romans 7:13).
- “...Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ” (Galatians 3:24).
- The law, used properly, is for the “ungodly and sinful. . .” (I Timothy 1:8-11).

So the law is of great use in this ungodly generation to bring people to the knowledge that they have sinned against a loving and holy God. Perhaps if we used the law more with “secularists,” we would have a larger number of genuine conversions.

Discipleship verses. As we have seen, all believers must believe in and accept God and Christ as their Lord. This would certainly make them a disciple (student) of Christ. As such, they should give their lives to Him and make it their ambition to love, serve, and follow Him with all their might. If someone consistently refused to do so, to whatever degree that is, there would be question that he is truly born of God. There seems to be no hard and fast delineation between salvation and discipleship in the teaching and ministry of Jesus, since some of the discipleship verses refer to the salvation of the soul.

But the question I would like to address is whether we should emphasize the discipleship verses initially in our evangelism—from the start confronting people with the need to forsake all and take up a cross (in the first-century society the cross was their electric chair). Perhaps we should take a look at what the Lord did in His evangelism, since He was, no doubt, the greatest evangelist ever.

Our Lord’s message, was “good news.” Concerning what He preached, Jesus said:

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, release to the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18-19). He came *“not to condemn the world, but to save the world”* (John 3:17). His message was extremely attractive; in fact it was wildly intoxicating to those who believed it. He preached, *“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”* (Matthew 4:17). This Kingdom is what the Jewish nation had been anticipating for centuries. His message offered the crowds *“rest,”* an *“easy yoke,”* and a *“light burden”* (Matthew 11:28-30). He offered *“living water”* that would cause people to never thirst again (John 4:10-13, 7:37). He promised, as the *“bread of life,”* to satisfy their innermost needs and desires. He said, *“I am the light of the world”* (John 8:12). He promised salvation and life abundantly (John 10:7-9). He promised eternal life and eternal security—*“they shall never perish”* (John 10:28).

“Grace will save a man... but it will not save him and his idol.”

—A.W.Tozer

But His message was not only attractive, it was also backed up with incredible supernatural power. Imagine what it would be like if someone came to your city, went to a hospital, and healed everyone he laid hands on. Then he went on to the next hospital and did the same... and then to the next and the next. It would be the biggest news of the century. NBC, CBS, ABC, and every other news outlet would be there. So would every sick person who could possibly come. This is exactly what was happening with Jesus (Matthew 4:23-24, 8:16, 9:35, 15:30-31, 19:2, 21:14). The multitudes were filled with excitement and euphoria.

"The law detects, grace alone conquers sin."

- Augustine

At times, Jesus made efforts to calm the euphoria. He told people to keep quiet about their healing (Luke 8:56). When He realized that they intended to come and make him king by force, He withdrew to a place where they couldn't find Him (John 6:15). And, at least twice, He publicly preached a "discipleship" message, urging people to count the cost of following Him. (The first time is recorded in Matthew 16:24, Mark 8:34-38, and Luke 9:23. The second is in Luke 14:25-33.) But He preached these messages to crowds that, apparently, had already professed to believe and had decided to follow along with Him as He traveled.

At times, Jesus did clearly challenge some men to discipleship right from the start - i.e. the rich young ruler in Matthew 19:16-30 and some others in Luke 9:57-62. Yet, usually, He asked people to follow Him with little or no initial mention of the costs of discipleship. This was true with Andrew and another disciple, to whom He simply said "*Follow me*" (John 1:43). Then again to Andrew and Peter, James and John, He said, "*Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men*" (Matthew 4:19). The same for Levi: "*Follow Me*" (Matthew 9:9). It seems that even His initial call to His most loyal followers did not include a message to forsake all or take up a cross, although following Him did include leaving their business. But leaving a business does not seem hard to ones who think that in a very short time, they will be reigning with the Messiah in His Kingdom. It appears that He did not share with them the "discipleship" verses until later in His ministry, after He had modeled a life of discipleship and had given them a taste of discipleship and ministry for themselves. Then, shortly before His death, He told them what was going to happen to Him and laid out the cost of discipleship if they were to continue following Him (Matthew 16:24-26).

In summary, it seems that, usually, Jesus' message did not initially include a call to forsake all or to take up an electric chair. Rather, He seemed to approach people with words of salvation, rest, forgiveness, healing, freedom, favor, and the coming of the Kingdom of God. Of course, He did also preach repeatedly about sin, righteousness, repentance, and the coming judgment, all in an effort to bring people to a point of repentance and faith.

Jesus was wildly popular with tens of thousands of "seekers." He spoke and ministered to all kinds of undevoted, undedicated people. Twice that we know of, He spoke to the crowds in such a way that many of them left. Yet at most times it did not seem to bother Him that there were huge crowds of people with all kinds of levels of commitment, from curiosity seekers and antagonists to loyal followers. His strategy seemed to be to train a core of loyal followers as He ministered to the crowds of the less committed. Yet even these loyal followers did not understand discipleship, but had their minds set on the things of man, rather than the things of God (Matthew 16:23). At the end of His life, there were none, apart from a few women, who stood with Him. And even after the resurrection, there were only 120 disciples in the upper room. Yet, this lack of commitment on the part of the crowds did not stop

our Lord from ministering to the crowds, nor did it discourage Him. His hope was rightly placed in His disciples, to whom He entrusted the task of taking the gospel to the ends of the earth.

I don't think it is wise to try to weed out all insincere people by initially overemphasizing the difficulties of following Christ. Neither do I believe it is proper to criticize Christian leaders who at times have a large following of uncommitted people, or to assume that their message is errant or soft. Certainly we err if we compromise any truth because of a desire to attract or hold a crowd. And it would be a mistake of strategy to make the crowds a priority over training loyal disciples. Yet we must be careful to really find out what is going on in a particular ministry before assuming that there has been compromise or a defection from the gospel, or a lack of training fully committed disciples.

"If you believe what you like in the Gospel, and reject what you don't like, it is not the Gospel you believe, but yourself."

- Augustine

Conclusions:

1. It is impossible to receive Jesus as Savior and later receive Him as Lord.
2. Repentance (a change of mind) is necessary for salvation, but the idea of repentance is broader than is commonly thought. It is the job of the evangelist to ascertain where an individual needs to repent.
3. Works of faith will always accompany true faith. We can know if a person has genuinely believed by his fruit.
4. The law is very helpful in evangelism and will point out a person's sin and need of salvation.
5. Although discipleship was a part of Jesus' message, He did not normally preach the "discipleship" verses initially when He preached the good news, but preached them later to those who had already professed to believe.



GRACE, WORKS, AND LORDSHIP

Exercise

1. What was the main lesson you learned from these articles?

2. Reflect back on when you were saved. Is what Dave Bovenmyer says about the necessity of recognizing Jesus as Lord and the necessity for repentance in order to be saved consistent with what happened in your salvation experience? Please explain.

3. Evaluate your gospel message. Based on this article, do you share adequately “the law” with those you desire to see come to Christ? What hinders you from being bold in proclaiming the law as well as the cross of Christ?

GRACE, WORKS, AND LORDSHIP**Exercise**

4. Suppose you see a person in the church who is continually sinning. If you were to approach that person and urge him/her to obey the Lord, would you in the course of the conversation question that person's salvation? Why or why not?

5. Do you believe the gospel presentation given publicly in church (on Sunday morning or at other meetings) have been (based on this article) accurate and effective presentations of the gospel message? Please explain.
