

LEADING GRACE

SUMMER, 2023

THE MAGAZINE OF THE FREE GRACE ALLIANCE



FANKHAUSER
IN SEARCH OF THE FRUITLESS
BELIEVER

HAWLEY
COMPLETE IN CHRIST

MANNING
GRACE MEANS GIVING UP

MIKKELSEN
A WORD OF ENCOURAGEMENT

PATE
THE LIES WE BELIEVE

LEADING GRACE SUMMER, 2023

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ON
GRACE

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A Letter from the President

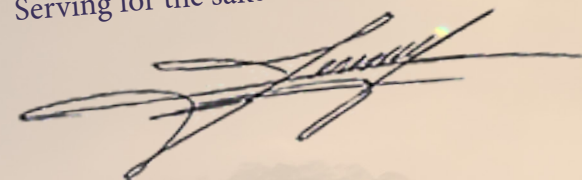
There is an axiom about life, and it feels like it is even more pronounced for those who have dedicated their lives to serving the Lord in ministry: "The one thing that never changes is that things are always changing." With that, it is our human tendency to want consistency and stability. So, we cling to whatever we see that doesn't change. For example, as people move in and out of churches, it feels good if the pastor stays the same. Or, as educational institutions and mission organizations have people come to teach or advance the mission and then move to other institution, the stockholders in those ministries want consistency in the mission, values, and beliefs.

Within the Free Grace Alliance this changing and yet staying consistent continues to hold true. As most of you have heard, Grant Hawley has stepped away from our Executive Director position in pursuit of new ministry opportunities. The Executive Council has been navigating this change for several months. And we are proud to announce that we have hired into that position a new Executive Director. Given the new Director's desire to be the one to communicate this change in his life with those he ministers to and with, I have agreed to not disclose his name in this publication at this time. Yet, the Executive Council feels like he, with his gifting and experience, is a perfect fit for what the Free Grace Alliance needs to continue to fulfill our mission into the future.

Speaking of our mission, this hasn't changed. The mission has been and will continue to be to advance the grace message throughout the world by connecting, encouraging, and equipping the body of Christ. We will continue to reach out to all points of the world through the internet, conferences, seminars, our magazine, and other media. Our beliefs and our covenant are not changing either. (You can check them out at <https://www.freegracealliance.com/about-us/>)

We are convinced our unchanging God is bringing about these changes in the Free Grace Alliance. Please pray for our Alliance, the Executive Council, our new Executive Director, and that we would continue to healthy and dynamic ways that brings glory to our Lord Jesus Christ.

Serving for the sake of the Gospel,



Jeremy Vance
President

GRACE MEANS GIVING UP

JOSH MANNING

ONE OF THE MOST POWERFULLY PRACTICAL examples of grace is the incarnation, the unrivaled act of the Son of God becoming human. What first comes to mind when you hear the word incarnation? It's a word that we associate with Christmas, right? Unfortunately, for most Christians in the West, this theological truth of the incarnation of the Son of God is often reduced to a seasonal celebration instead of what it truly is: an awesome sacrificial act of God's grace for humankind. In American culture specifically, the incarnation of Christ that we celebrate during the Christmas season is a time known for giving, even more than receiving. And why not? Didn't Jesus Himself say that "it is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35)? Paul agrees when he writes "God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor 9:7b). Of course, giving is a powerful way of reflecting God's image. That being said, does the Christmas spirit of giving that our Western culture values so much actually capture the depth of God's grace that is wrapped in the incarnation of Christ? Could there actually be more to giving than just 'giving'?

In His birth for us, the Son of God had to become like those He was not like, in order to be close to those He was far from.

Recently, God has been showing me the exclusively grace-driven nature of Jesus' sacrifice. This was not only demonstrated on the cross when He died for our sins, but also through the very act of leaving Heaven and becoming a man. So, His initial sacrifice modeled for us the source and standard of true significance in this life. In other words, what Christ suffered on the cross began for Him when He chose to suffer through taking on humanity. The Apostle John explains Jesus' incarnation when he wrote, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14a). In His birth for us, the Son of God had to become like those He was not like, in order to be close to those He was far from. He gave up incomprehensible things to do so. The Son of God chose willingly to sacrifice His pre-incarnate experience so that humanity could experience abundant life with Him (John 10:10). What amazing grace! I really appreciate how the New Living Translation communicates Paul's theology of the incarnation:

"You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross." (Phil 2:5-8, emphasis added).

Interestingly, the Greek verb, *kenoō*, translated here as "gave up" or "emptied" in the New King James Version, is where the theological term *kenosis* originates, describing that Christ humbly chose to limit Himself. Jesus Christ did not empty Himself of His divine nature, but of the limitless expression of that nature as a human being. Dr. Joe Wall, Professor of Systematic Theology at Grace School of Theology, gives helpful insight into the person of Christ when he comments, "The term, 'emptied,' is a translation of the Greek word, *κενόω* (*kenoō*), which means to empty something like emptying a glass of water. From this we get the term "kenosis" which refers to the doctrine about how Jesus could be God, and at the same time function as a man. When the Divine Logos became man, He voluntarily limited the use of His incommunicable, divine attributes." (Christology class notes).

For the past decade, God has called my family and me to work alongside Native American believers within the context of a small Bible College in Northern Arizona. Partnering with Native American believers over the last decade has caused me to take a much closer look at what it means to live as a minority. I have not only experienced this by learning to look through the eyes of an ethnic minority such as the Native American people, but even more specifically, I am learning to humbly peer through the lens of a minority among minorities. Sound complicated? Through this, God has been teaching me some incredible lessons about Jesus and the supernaturally selfless and gracious nature of His incarnation. You see, though my family and I are technically included in the "white majority" of this nation, within the Native American and Native Bible College contexts, we actually have become a minority among minorities. This has given me a much better glimpse into the purpose of Christ's incarnation for me. I am learning through this season of life and ministry that to deeply meet the needs of others I, like Jesus, must not just give. I must be willing to give up (*kenoō*). I desperately need God's undeserved empowerment, His matchless grace, to truly give up for the sake of others. In other words, I can't do this without His enabling grace. More and more, I need His help to give up my personal rights (such as comfort, belonging, status, success, personal justice, etc.) in order to truly serve others sacrificially and without expectation of any kind of compensation. Just as Jesus sacrificed Himself to be the payment for our sins, so also, He sacrificed His divine rights as God the Son (the free exercise of His divine attributes) to pave the way of significance through sacrifice. Jesus chose to come and live as THE Minority among minorities. He came to the human race, and specifically to the Jewish people--both completely foreign to Jesus' nature prior to His human birth. Beyond that, even among His Jewish countrymen He chose to be another kind of minority—a servant of all. He just kept giving up for us! Such an undeserved and unconditional gift.

Like Him, our Christian lives should be characterized not only by an attitude of giving, but even more importantly by a life of giving up—surrendering those “rights” that hinder us from graciously reaching out to and relating with those God has called us to serve with absolutely no strings attached. Living incarnationally is all about living a life of undeserved sacrifice for others, not seasonally, but daily, like Jesus. He not only saved us by grace, once and for all (Heb 10:10), but also gave up for us continually by grace. He was willing to lay down His rightful pre-incarnate position and privilege as the Son of God to show us how to live this life with eternal value (Phil 2:5-11).

Throughout this pericope in Philippians 2:1-11, Paul’s central point is that Jesus Christ’s incarnation is the ultimate example of gracious self-sacrifice for the sake of serving someone else. The Philippian church needed to understand the importance of all Jesus gave up from His incarnation to His crucifixion, and their need to follow Him with the same humble perspective. Throughout this passage, Paul spells out the reason (vv. 1-4) and result (vv. 9-11) for such radical self-sacrifice (vv. 5-8). First, Paul gives four reasons for giving up one’s own desires for the sake of others:

Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others (2:1-4).

It should be noted that Paul assumes each of these statements to be true of the Philippian believers (stated by the Greek first-class condition, “if”). These reasons were the incentive for living sacrificially for others: they had spiritual encouragement in Christ, loving comfort from their relationship with Paul and each other, fellowship as a church family through the power of the Spirit, and a special affection and compassion from Jesus Christ Himself (1:8; 2:1) (Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on Philippians 2023 Edition).

In summary, these same reasons are God’s gracious enablement for us to live a life of sacrificial others-centeredness. Second, whereas the introductory portion of this text (2:1-4) gives the reason, the final three verses of Paul’s main thought present the readers with God’s ultimate result of self-sacrifice—exaltation. Here he records what followed Jesus’ life of faithful humiliation and suffering:

“Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name,

that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (2:9-11)

Contrary to God’s perspective, human reasoning believes that people give in order to receive what they want. However, God’s kingdom way of living teaches that we receive what is eternally significant because we give up those earthly self-interests that distract us from what He wants. It’s all about losing what we want for the sake of gaining His ultimate purpose for our lives both now and in the life to come (Matt 16:24-27). Once again, Jesus is not only the perfect pattern for selfless sacrifice but also for eternal significance (Phil 2:9). The amazing thing is, when God calls us to give something up that is significant to us personally, He always gives abundantly more than what we could ever sacrifice for Him (Eph 3:20)! In order for Jesus to be elevated by the Father to the highest place of honor possible, He chose to be hurt throughout His humanity—from His birth to His death—in perfect righteousness. Thus, it has been designed by God for every believer: humiliation must come before exaltation—suffering before glorification (1 Pet 2:21-23). When we graciously give up for the sake of others, God will richly reward us in this life (Jas 1:12), and with far greater riches in the next (2 Cor 4:17-18).

HUMILIATION MUST COME BEFORE EXALTATION

Whether we are celebrating Christmas in July, a white Christmas in December, or any season of life in between, let’s keep this mindset: Jesus is our one true pattern and our power source for giving up what we think we deserve in order to serve others, especially when that means disregarding our own interests. I pray that our everyday attitude is not only one of receiving and giving gifts, but even more importantly, one of finding true significance through gracious sacrifice. This kind of selfless attitude is definitely not the majority perspective among humanity, and is completely impossible on our own apart from His grace. Living meaningfully means that we, like Jesus, become a minority for the sake of others, even when it means giving up our preferences in order for the Father’s greater purpose to be accomplished in and through us.

THE FREE GRACE ALLIANCE COVENANT

WE AFFIRM THE FOLLOWING:

- **THE GRACE OF GOD IN JUSTIFICATION IS AN UNCONDITIONAL FREE GIFT.**
- **THE SOLE MEANS OF RECEIVING THE FREE GIFT OF ETERNAL LIFE IS FAITH IN THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, THE SON OF GOD, WHO DIED ON THE CROSS AS OUR SUBSTITUTE, FULLY SATISFYING THE REQUIREMENT FOR OUR JUSTIFICATION, AND WAS RAISED BODILY FROM THE DEAD.**
- **FAITH IS A PERSONAL RESPONSE, APART FROM OUR WORKS, WHEREBY WE ARE PERSUADED THAT THE FINISHED WORK OF JESUS CHRIST, HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION, HAS DELIVERED US FROM CONDEMNATION AND GUARANTEED OUR ETERNAL LIFE.**
- **JUSTIFICATION IS THE ACT OF GOD TO DECLARE US RIGHTEOUS WHEN WE BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST ALONE.**
- **ASSURANCE OF JUSTIFICATION IS THE BIRTHRIGHT OF EVERY BELIEVER FROM THE MOMENT OF FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST, AND IS FOUNDED UPON THE TESTIMONY OF GOD IN HIS WRITTEN WORD.**
- **SPIRITUAL GROWTH, WHICH IS DISTINCT FROM JUSTIFICATION, IS GOD’S EXPECTATION FOR EVERY BELIEVER; THIS GROWTH, HOWEVER, IS NOT NECESSARILY MANIFESTED UNIFORMLY IN EVERY BELIEVER.**
- **THE GOSPEL OF GRACE SHOULD ALWAYS BE PRESENTED WITH SUCH CLARITY AND SIMPLICITY THAT NO IMPRESSION IS LEFT THAT JUSTIFICATION REQUIRES ANY STEP, RESPONSE, OR ACTION IN ADDITION TO FAITH IN THE LORD JESUS CHRIST.**
- **IN AGREEMENT WITH THESE AFFIRMATIONS, WE COVENANT TO WORK TOGETHER GRACIOUSLY AND ENTHUSIASTICALLY TO ADVANCE THIS GOSPEL OF GRACE, AND TO COMMUNICATE WITH A POSITIVE AND GRACIOUS TONE TOWARD ALL OTHERS, BOTH INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE FREE GRACE ALLIANCE.**

CARMEN PATE

THE LIES
WE
BELIEVE

AS YOU THINK ABOUT YOUR ETERNAL SALVATION

and your daily walk and maturity in Christ, have you ever believed one or more of these statements?

- 1. I MUST MEET CERTAIN STANDARDS IN ORDER TO BE ACCEPTED BY GOD AND TO HAVE ASSURANCE THAT I AM GOING TO HEAVEN WHEN I DIE.**
- 2. I MUST HAVE APPROVAL OF CERTAIN CHRISTIANS OR A CERTAIN CHURCH DENOMINATION TO HAVE ASSURANCE THAT I AM INDEED A BELIEVER.**
- 3. I HAVE FAILED IN MY PAST AND CAN'T BE ASSURED THAT GOD HAS FORGIVEN ME; THEREFORE, I CAN'T BE CERTAIN I'M A CHRISTIAN. I EXPECT GOD TO PUNISH ME.**
- 4. I STILL FAIL REGULARLY, THOUGH I TRY HARD NOT TO FAIL. I CAN'T SEEM TO CHANGE. SO, I GUESS I NEVER WAS SAVED AND CAN'T BE SAVED. MY LIFE IS HOPELESS; WHY EVEN TRY?**

Friends, these are all lies of the enemy to either keep you from becoming a Christian or to steal your joy and assurance once you have believed. I know, because I have believed one or all four of these lies at various times in my Christian walk. Perhaps you have heard these lies presented in the original text, as explained by Robert McGee in his timeless classic, *The Search for Significance*. Though the context might change, the enemy's tactics don't change. Satan and his demons, though not all knowing like God, are very observant and have observed mankind since the beginning. They have learned that we are gullible to these specific lies and so they use them generation after generation to keep unbelievers from salvation, to keep believers from assurance, and to steal our joy and hope for abundant living here on earth.



THE LIES WE BELIEVE

The key to abundant living this side of heaven is assurance of our identity in Jesus Christ and our confidence in our eternal salvation and forgiveness of sins. We obtain this freedom through faith alone in the finished work of Christ alone.

A quote by author Anna Light speaks to this. She writes: You see, our enemy knows the most powerful person on the planet is a free person. Someone set free by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, someone able to rise above the lies of the enemy and walk in the truth of who we are—that is a dangerous person to the enemy. He will do everything he can to keep you in bondage to insecurity, focused on the wrong things, and stagnant in your faith. The enemy doesn't want us free. That is the very reason we must be free.

So, how do we combat these lies that steal our freedom, our daily assurance, and joy? Second Corinthians 10:3-5 says:

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not wage battle according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying arguments and all arrogance raised against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. (NASB, here and throughout)

We use our spiritual weapons of warfare to combat the lies. We are then free to live out our identity in Christ with full assurance of our future with Him. Let's go back to the four lies and contrast those with the truth of God's word, so we are ready to defend ourselves when Satan tries once again to tempt us, because he will, again and again. He may leave us for a while, but he'll return at a more vulnerable time for us. We get tired, we get weary, we get wounded, we suffer, we fear, and we don't understand this thing called life. On those days, friends, we are most vulnerable to the lies of the enemy. We must prepare now for the attack.



I MUST MEET CERTAIN STANDARDS IN ORDER TO BE ACCEPTED BY GOD AND TO KNOW THAT I AM GOING TO HEAVEN WHEN I DIE.

"I cannot miss church; I cannot miss reading the Bible every day; I must not sin," and so on. The truth is: God's love can never be earned and can never be lost. He loves us with an everlasting love that sent His one and only Son

to die for your sins and mine. Christ, who is fully human and fully God, is the only acceptable sacrifice that could appease God and pay the debt for our sin in full, by shedding His blood on the cross. God loved us so much that He made a way, through Christ's sacrifice, for our sins to be completely forgiven—past, present, and future.

And what is my part? To believe, by faith alone in Christ alone, that Christ died for me personally, and rose again to conquer death for me. I am a sinner and I need a Savior. Because I have trusted Jesus, I am totally accepted into God's forever family. Romans 4:3-5 reminds us:

For what does the Scripture say? 'ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.' Now to the one who works, the wages are not credited as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness.



I MUST HAVE APPROVAL OF CERTAIN CHRISTIANS OR A CERTAIN CHURCH DENOMINATION TO HAVE ASSURANCE THAT I AM INDEED A BELIEVER.

Have you ever felt that someone you assumed was more righteous than you was regularly judging your actions? I'm not talking about a loving confrontation from a brother or sister in Christ who has witnessed your sin firsthand and wants to help you get back on the right path. We should welcome correction when presented in truth and love, when the motive is to see us restored. No, I'm speaking of those who say things like, "you can't be a Christian if you do this or that." Or, "you can't be a Christian if you don't do this or that." Those individuals cast regular doubt on your salvation and may steal your assurance and joy. Maybe you can relate to trying hard, not only to earn God's acceptance, but acceptance into a church body, by pleasing certain Christians, by following all of the perceived rules of a certain denomination. The continuous effort to prove to yourself and to those watching that you are indeed a Christian is exhausting. "Have I done the right thing?" "Have I done enough?" What behavior will prove to them I am a Christian?" Friends, the truth is, we have an audience of One, Jesus Christ. He is the only One whom we will stand before when we pass from this earth. God is the only One who knows our heart and accepts us as we are because we have trusted Jesus. It would be nice if others liked me, approved of me, and accepted me for who I am. But the truth is, the King of kings and Lord of lords says I am His child,

and I am totally accepted by Him. That's enough for me. I no longer have to live life out of a sense of duty. I can now live a "thank you" life of obedience, assured of what Christ has done for me. Romans 8:33 says, "Who will bring charges against God's elect? God is the one who justifies."



I HAVE FAILED IN MY PAST AND CAN'T BE ASSURED THAT GOD HAS FORGIVEN ME, THEREFORE I CAN'T BE CERTAIN I'M A CHRISTIAN. I EXPECT GOD TO PUNISH ME.

As a woman whose past includes horrendous sin, I often bought this lie. Anytime circumstances were bad in my life, I assumed it was God's punishment for my past. Oh, how freeing it was for me to know the truth, and to have assurance that God indeed has forgiven my past sins. Jesus took the punishment for all sin. We were enemies of God, but Christ died to reconcile us to God while we were yet sinners.

There is no greater theme in Scripture than the reconciliation of man to God. Consider Romans 4:7: "Blessed (happy, envied) are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven." The truth is, I am completely forgiven, totally accepted, and unconditionally loved by God. And so are you if you have trusted Jesus.



I STILL FAIL REGULARLY, THOUGH I TRY HARD NOT TO FAIL. I CAN'T SEEM TO CHANGE. SO, I GUESS I NEVER WAS SAVED AND CAN'T BE SAVED. MY LIFE IS HOPELESS; WHY EVEN TRY?

This is a common lie believed by those with addictions or habitual sin, and frankly, all of us who sin daily. Max Lucado says, "God loves us the way we are, but He loves us too much to leave us that way." That is why the Holy Spirit, living in us, is transforming us into the image of Christ. Though our salvation was instantaneous—the moment we believed in Jesus—our transformation takes a lifetime.

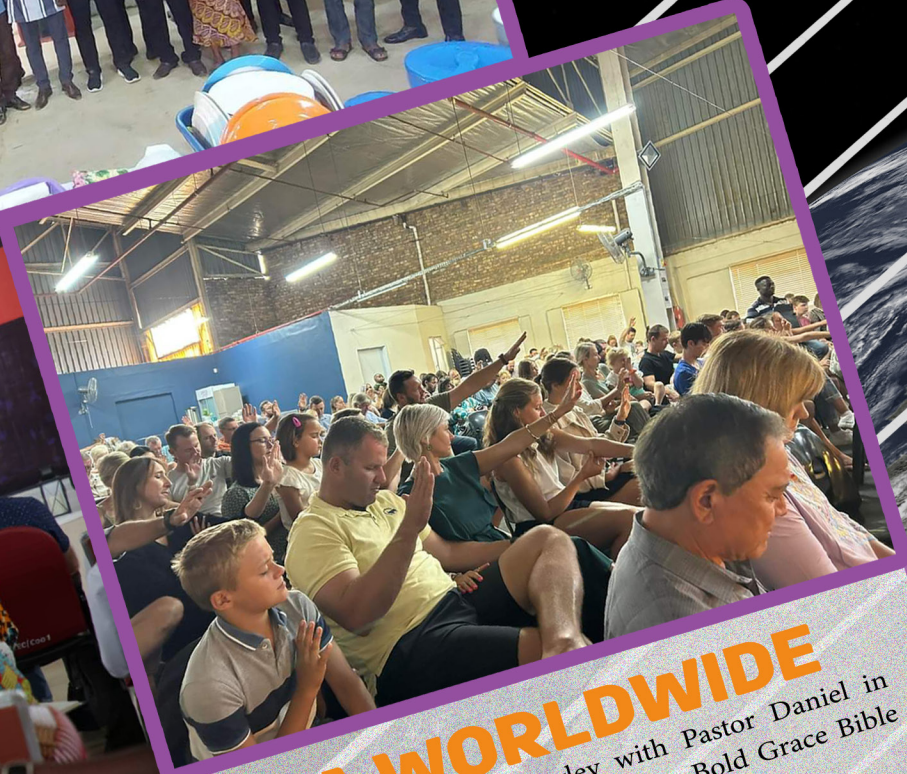
Only when we see Christ face to face, after passing from this fallen world, will we be like Him. So, our sinful flesh is still operating here on earth, hoping to destroy our testimony and steal our assurance.

Our flesh battles daily with the Spirit, and we regularly fall victim to failure. God knew that we would, and so He gave believers the promise of 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous, so that He will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

This promise is about restoring intimacy that has been broken with Christ because of sin. We can be assured that our relationship in the family of God is permanent and never in jeopardy. But when we sin, our intimacy is broken until we agree with God that we failed and, in repentance, seek intimacy to be restored. He always welcomes us back into His loving arms. Lamentations 3:22-23 tells us, "The LORD'S acts of mercy indeed do not end, for His compassions do not fail. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness."

If you have trusted Jesus for salvation you are a child of God, and no one, not even you, can snatch you from God's hand. You are completely forgiven, totally accepted, and unconditionally loved by God. And you are a new creation in Christ Jesus. Ephesians 2:10 says, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them." The New Living Translation says, "we are His masterpiece." I like that. We read in Ephesians 1:11, 13-14: "In Him we also have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things in accordance with the plan of His will, in Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of the promise, who is a first installment of our inheritance, in regard to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory."

What does this mean practically for you and me? Our destiny is guaranteed not by what we do, but by who we are, and whose we are in Christ Jesus. And friends, that assurance will indeed set you free to live life now out of thankfulness!



FGA WORLDWIDE

Top row: L - Grant Hawley with Pastor Daniel in Kumasi, Ghana; R - Grant with the Bold Grace Bible Institute - Ghana students in Accra

Middle Row: L - Jody Dillow at Grace Bible Church in Portage, WI; M - Dr. Mark Haywood in Kumasi, Ghana; R - Dr. Charlie Bing in Nelspruit, South Africa

Bottom Row: L - Grant preaching in Geneva, Switzerland; R - Grant preaching at the FGA Regional Conference in Kumasi, Ghana

COMPLETE COMPLETE IN CHRIST IN CHRIST

GRANT HAWLEY
GRANT HAWLEY

One of my favorite passages in Scripture is Colossians 2:1-10, in which Paul teaches us that Christ is truly enough, and we don't need anything else. I generally like to use the NKJV or the ESV when teaching, but while those translations aren't bad in this passage, there are some things going on in the Greek that add some depth to the passage that get lost in them, so I'm going to use my own literal translation in 2:1-10 to bring some of those things out. Feel free to compare with any literal translation or follow along in the Greek if you're able. The passage reads:

For I want you to know how great a fight I have for you and those in Laodicia and all who have not seen my face in the flesh, that their hearts may be encouraged, knit together by love, and for all the riches of full assurance produced by understanding the full knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of the Christ, in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden. And this I say so that no one should deceive you through persuasive speech.

For though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in the spirit, rejoicing and seeing your order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ. Therefore, just as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith as you have been taught, superabounding in it with thanksgiving.

Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men and the elementary principles of the world and not according to Christ, because in Him dwells all the fullness of the godhead bodily and you are filled up in Him, who is the Head of all power and authority.

When jumping into the middle of a book, there are always a lot of things leading up to our passage that help us understand what it means. So, let's talk about the context a little. Chapter 1 tells us Who Jesus is, but the chapter ends with Paul talking a little bit about his ministry as an apostle of Christ. He says in verses 24-29:

I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God, the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.

A lot of people struggle with Paul saying here: "I...fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ" but it isn't a statement that Christ's death is somehow not enough. He just means that additional work and suffering is needed to share the gospel and establish churches all around the known world. As ministers of the gospel (that's all of us), we are called to suffering. That suffering is not to pay for sins, but is just part of doing the work of ministry.

God had given Paul a stewardship, and he labored according to Christ's mighty working in him with the goal of presenting every man perfect in Christ Jesus. The word "striving" here in v 29 is a closely related word to what Paul uses in 2:1 that I've translated "fight" and the NKJV translates as "conflict."

By saying in 2:1, “I want you to know how great a fight I have for you” he’s showing them how much they mean to him, even though they have never even seen his face in person. He loves them dearly and he is willing to suffer greatly for them. The word sometimes translates to “anxiety” and is where we get our English word, “agony.” It doesn’t mean agony here, but we should understand that it communicates that what he’s done for them is difficult. Not only is he willing to fight and suffer for them, but he has been doing it. He’s telling them this so that when he warns them against those who would deceive them, they can know it comes from a place of deep love.

I want to always listen to correction, but I have to admit that it is a lot easier to accept when it comes from someone who I know loves me enough to suffer for me.

Paul’s fighting for these brethren is for something in particular here. It has a couple of parts:

That their hearts may be encouraged, knit together by love, and for all the riches of full assurance produced by understanding the full knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of the Christ in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden.

The first part is that he wants their hearts to be encouraged and knit together by love. So he wants them to experience their oneness as Christ’s body and for it to encourage them, but this is not an end in itself, it’s for a the purpose that they would have “all the riches of full assurance produced by understanding the full knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of the Christ.”

The mystery of God here is not doctrine in general, but something specific. In Colossians 1 Paul calls the mystery among the Gentiles as “Christ in you, the hope of glory” and in Ephesians 3, Paul says it is “that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel.” So, the basic premise of the mystery here is that Gentile believers in Christ have equal standing and are members of the same body of Christ as Jewish believers, and that through the gospel. We can have an academic understanding of our oneness with Christ, but when you are talking about people from vastly different backgrounds and cultures, that isn’t always going to sink in. What if some believers think that their position is greater because they have special knowledge or they hold to the Law of Moses, or they are descended from Jacob, or something else? If there’s tension between these believers keeping them separate, that kind of thinking can sink in. But Paul knows that if these believers have their hearts knit together by love that there is no room for that kind of thinking. Everyone will lift up and encourage one another instead.

**OUR
BLESSED
ASSURANCE
COMES
FROM
HAVING
SOUND
DOCTRINE
REGARDING
OUR
SALVATION
AND OUR
POSITION IN
CHRIST.**

As believers in Free Grace theology, we understand, at least to some degree, how precious it is to have full assurance and that that assurance comes from understanding God’s word in Christ. Our blessed assurance comes from having sound doctrine regarding our salvation and our position in Christ. Here, their being knit together by love gives the right setting to produce that knowledge, and that full knowledge brings that full assurance.

This passage is parallel to the passage about the function of the Body of Christ in Ephesians 4:11-17, which reads:

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

Christ gave various kinds of leaders to the church “for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry.” That word for “equipping” was used as a medical term for setting broken bones or dislocated joints. Paul brings up joints in v 16 as he talks about the body of Christ, and that phrase “knit together” that we saw in Colossians 2 appears here again, so we can see that that idea is what Paul intended by his use of the word. The church leaders are to set the body together so that it can work like it should in the ministry. The body functions properly and grows and matures when the members are set together as they should be.

In Colossians 3:14, Paul says that love is “the bond of perfection” but that phrase in the Greek literally means that love “is the perfect ligament.” It is what holds the body together. In Colossians 2:1-2, Paul says he fights so that these believers whom he has never met would have their hearts knit together by love, and for the full assurance that comes from sound doctrine.

When Paul brings up the fact that he fights for these believers and has suffered for them, he’s cashing in on the goodwill he’s earned with them. It’s not something he can do over and over. It’s similar to a mom who says, “I carried you for 9 months and went through 22 hours of labor for you.” That means, “OK, I had better listen.”

The fact that Paul is playing this card should tell us how important this message is to him. Paul is greatly concerned that people would undercut their assurance by deceiving them through persuasive speech and cheat them with cunning deceit. He’s making sure they hear his warning.

When we see the positive truth Paul is communicating, we can get an idea of what deception these deceivers were trying to seduce them into. In short, they were trying to tell them that Christ is not enough. Let’s look through the rest of Colossians 2 to see what Paul’s talking about:

In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.

So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ. Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God.

Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations—“Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,” which all concern things which perish with the using—according to the commandments and doctrines of men? These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.

The false teachers wanted these believers to think that they are lacking something. They have to keep the law, they have to have the world’s philosophy, or they have to ascribe to asceticism by restricting their foods or whatever else, or they have to peek into how the angels worship and copy them.

These false teachers say there’s hidden knowledge they need, and Paul says all of the hidden knowledge is revealed in Christ. They say they need circumcision and to keep the holy days and festivals, but Paul says all of that is just a shadow and the substance of it is in Christ. The false teachers say they have to subject themselves to regulations, but Paul says they have died to the elementary principles of the world. What they say sounds like wisdom, but it is of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.

**YOU’RE COMPLETE IN
YOU’RE COMPLETE IN
CHRIST AS YOU ARE.
CHRIST AS YOU ARE.**

Don’t let anyone deceive you. Paul writes in Colossians 2:6, “As you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him.” You received Him by faith, walk by faith. The Christian life is a moment by moment receiving of Christ’s power over sin that we receive each moment the same way we received Christ. By simple faith. We don’t need the world’s wisdom or legalism or self-imposed religion, because we’re full in Christ. And just as importantly, in 2:6, Paul is emphasizing that these Gentile brothers don’t need to become culturally Jewish to be fully accepted in Christ. You received Christ as Colossians, walk as Colossians (compare 1 Cor 7:17-24), because you’re complete in Christ as you are.

Paul writes in Colossians 3:11 that in the Body of Christ, the New Man, “...there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, slave, free, but Christ is all, and in all.” And similarly in Galatians 3:28, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

In Galatians 4:17b, Paul writes of the Judaizers, “They want to exclude you so that you may be zealous for them.” And the heart of legalism always works this way. It’s about excluding people in order to give the impression of its own superiority. One way for us to search our own hearts for strongholds of legalism is to think through how we relate to various people and people groups. If we tend to look down on, say derogatory things about, or exclude others, we may find some legalism at the heart of it.

But if we understand that all of the worldly distinctions that separate us are done away in Christ, we can truly let our hearts be “knit together by love.”

IF WE UNDERSTAND THAT ALL OF THE WORLDLY DISTINCTIONS THAT SEPARATE US ARE DONE AWAY IN CHRIST, WE CAN TRULY LET OUR HEARTS BE “KNIT TOGETHER BY LOVE.”

In Colossians, Paul keeps using the word “full” and a prefix that means “full” when referring to the things of Christ. The popular translations leave a lot of that out, probably because it starts to feel redundant after a while. But from “For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell” in 1:19 on, fullness is a major theme. All the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Christ Bodily and we are full in Him. We don’t just have assurance, we have full assurance. We don’t just have knowledge in Him, we have full knowledge. In fact, we are not just full, we’re superabounding, overflowing.

But everything outside of Him is empty. It’s vainly puffed up or at best a shadow. There’s no substance in it because the substance is Christ.

What Paul is desperate for these believers to know is that when it comes to spiritual things, they don’t need anything other than Christ. That every single one of them is full and superabounding because they have Christ, and that there is no distinction or anything else that they need to be in His favor. By being knit together in love, they can reinforce that fact with each other daily and they can live in the full assurance of the sufficiency of Christ.



Thank you

It has been an honor to serve you all as the Executive Director of FGA. There is nothing in the world more precious than the gospel; and I’m blessed to have been able to work together with you to share that beautiful message with the world. I wanted to say thank you for your encouragement, support, and your other efforts to help FGA share grace graciously. As a fellow FGA member, I am looking forward to working alongside you all until the Lord calls us home.



Steve Hinkle





A WORD OF
ENCOURAGEMENT
TO THOSE IN
MINISTRY WHO
TEACH GRACE

If you are familiar with the sermon in Luke 6 about good fruit coming from a good tree and bad fruit from a bad tree, but you understand that Jesus is talking about evaluating teachers rather than giving a sermon on fruit inspection, then this letter is for you. Alongside good exegesis, historical knowledge, and sound theology, there is one essential thing we all need—encouragement.

If you serve God in a place where you are one of the few (or the only one) who teaches grace, I empathize with you. I've been there and done that. It's tough always being that person, having to argue for the simplicity of the gospel while others turn to other pastors for answers. Sometimes you may even be accused of teaching "cheap grace." It can feel lonely. Remember, though, you are not alone. There is a remnant of us who firmly stand for grace (1 Peter 5:12). Take heart and run the good race! Shine your light and put it on a lampstand for the world to see. Let's pray for one another, that God will protect and cause our ministries to prosper.

Or perhaps you serve God where you have leadership that upholds grace. Praise the Lord! These places do actually exist. I am at one now. But even with supportive leadership and like-minded teachers, ministry is still hard. Every time someone new comes along, you have to start over with the basics. Everyone is happy until you start talking about rewards and the bema seat, and suddenly people are reacting defensively. Actually, under grace, the spiritual scene is even more daunting. I have had multiple people involved in the occult swing by. It feels like a non-stop barrage of issues, situations, and conflicts. But some of them hear the gospel and believe it—pure joy. Sometimes it feels like someone is ready to say that we are "conflict prone." Don't take it personally. Truth divides. Grace is offensive to humanity. Is your ministry really humming—expect opposition. None of this is new, my dear friend Ed Underwood is fond of repeating the same message he heard from Charles Ryrie when he taught at DTS: "If people are not warning you against the dangers

of grace, you are not preaching the grace of God in Christ." Let's pray for one another that God will embolden us and cause your ministry to prosper.

Or perhaps you are not serving God vocationally, but you want to be. Maybe you're church job hunting or trying to find a church that you can help with a doctrinal statement you can get behind. Not a lot of good options out there, right? Oh, wait, you want to get paid a living wage? Maybe a good fit pops into view and you feel great—you can sign the doctrinal statement... but when you show up to the interview the senior pastor has the largest collection of MacArthur and Grudem you have ever seen and not a grace friend to be found. You wonder to yourself, "Have they actually read their church's doctrinal statement?" This is to be expected. (Jude 17-19) Let's pray for one another that God will provide you an opportunity to be effective in ministry, and cause your ministry to prosper.

Or maybe you have served but are taking a break. Ministry is hard, doubly so if you are teaching grace. Whether it's a sabbatical or a new job, rest is essential. Don't be so hard on yourself; consider it a gift to be received gratefully. Take time to recharge, keep reading and learning, and experience afresh the mercy of God. You know in your mind that God has this under control. However, your heart has been left deeply wounded. The scars are fresh, the hurt is deep. Take it all to the Lord. He knows how you feel—rejected by those who should have known better. It has been thousands of years, but I bet the scars are still fresh on Jesus' hands, feet, and heart. Don't be afraid to seek counsel, wisdom, and encouragement from mature believers who have the appropriate gifts and training. Let's pray for one another that God will heal and restore you and cause your ministry to prosper.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, let us stand together for grace, always remembering to pray for one another. Let us celebrate our tribulations and our perseverance. Let us hold out hope because of the love of God that has been poured out for us by His grace.

JEREMY MIKKELSEN



Lead Pastor @ Lacey Bible
Church, Washington State
& FGA Board Member

ROMANS 5:1-5

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

IN SEARCH OF THE FRUITLESS BELIEVER

ROGER FANKHAUSER



The 1977-1982 TV series “In Search of,” hosted by Leonard Nimoy, explored mysterious phenomena of all kinds. Some dug into more “real world” mysteries, such as “In Search of Amelia Earheart.” Others searched more far-fetched mysteries, such as “In Search of Reincarnation” or “In Search of UFO Captives.” In the world of Free Grace Theology, one episode could be called “In Search of The Fruitless Believer.” Here the question being searched out would be: Is it possible for someone who believes in the person and work of Jesus Christ (that is, he or she is a “genuine” believer) to never produce any fruit in his or her life after conversion?

Before the search begins, we need to know what we are looking for. Unfortunately, the New Testament gives no simple, clear definition of fruit. It does, however, give enough information so that we can develop a broad, but useful, definition. Sometimes fruit refers to literal fruit, such as grapes, figs, or other agricultural production (e.g., Matt 21:19, 21:34). Sometimes the author uses the agricultural crop figuratively (e.g., Matt 13:3-8, John 15:1-8). And sometimes the author links the term “fruit” to something more specific. Jesus speaks of “bearing fruit in keeping with repentance” (Matt 3:8). He also speaks of knowing a false prophet by his fruit (his words, Matt 7:20). Elizabeth calls Jesus the fruit of Mary’s womb (Luke 1:42). Fruit also describes the results of evangelism (John 4:36), financial contributions (Rom 15:28), thanksgiving and praise (Heb 13:15), and good works (Col. 1:10). Sometimes “fruit” describes internal character changes such as the “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal 5:22-23). Thus, far from providing a simple description of “fruit,” the New Testament paints a very broad picture. For this search for the fruitless believer, we’ll use this definition:

Fruit: Any positive work, act, thought, or internal change produced in or through the believer by the Holy Spirit, including the absence of a deed of the flesh that the believer might otherwise produce.

The search for the fruitless believer must address three cases:

- 1. IS IT POSSIBLE TO KNOW IF AN INDIVIDUAL IS GENUINELY FRUITLESS?**
- 2. DOES THE BIBLE PROVIDE ANY EXAMPLES OF A FRUITLESS BELIEVER?**
- 3. IS THE HYPOTHETICAL CASE FOR THE FRUITLESS BELIEVER PLAUSIBLE?**

IS IT POSSIBLE TO KNOW IF SOMEONE IS GENUINELY FRUITLESS?

If a person were to evaluate my life as a believer, they would need to know every detail, positive or negative, of every waking moment, every day, for fifty years. No one knows me that well, not even my wife of 48 years. She knows some of my actions, some of my words, some of my deeds. She may correctly surmise some of my thoughts. But she cannot and does not know everything. If she never saw any fruit at any time, the most she could say would be, “In the context of my time with him, I see nothing that I would say is fruit.” The same conclusion applies to anyone. The most we can say is, in the contexts we observed them we are unaware of any fruit in their life. We simply cannot know every detail of every minute of anyone’s life from the moment they believed until now. Thus, we cannot conclude from our observation that any person is genuinely fruitless. But what about the second question?

DOES THE BIBLE PROVIDE ANY EXAMPLES OF A FRUITLESS BELIEVER?

Of course, if the answer here is “yes,” the answer to the first becomes moot. Scripture trumps experience. The New Testament provides some examples we must explore to determine if it teaches the possibility of a fruitless believer: (1) Jesus’ parable of the talents (Matt 25:14-30) and the similar parable of the minas (Luke 19:11-27), (2) The fruit and the vine (John 15:1-11), (3) The thief on the cross (Luke 23:39-43), (4) Simon the Sorcerer (Acts 8:9-24), and (5) The believer who builds with wood, hay, and stubble (1 Cor 3:8-15).

THE PARABLES OF THE TALENTS (MATT 25:14-30) AND THE MINAS (LUKE 19:11-27)

In each of these parables, the master entrusts significant financial resources to his servants. In the parable of the talents, each servant is given a different amount (five, two, and one talents); in the parable of the minas, each servant is given the same amount (ten minas). In each parable, the first two servants bring back a good return (“fruit”) on the master’s investment. They each receive praise and reward from their master.

In each parable, the third servant hid the money and earned no return on the master’s investment. Each simply returned to the master what had been entrusted to him. Each claimed their lack of action resulted from their fear of the master (Matt 25:24-25, Luke 19:21). In each case, the master cut through the servant’s excuses, addressing the real character flaw in chastising them (“you wicked, lazy slave,” Matt 25:26, “you worthless slave,” Luke 19:23). Given that all the servants on these two parables are believers, do these third servants provide evidence of fruitless believers?

IN SEARCH OF THE FRUITLESS BELIEVER

The genre of these stories provides a clue. “Usually a parable, like a sermon illustration, is teaching a single truth” (Roy B. Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation*, 215). In other words, parables usually provide a single main point, rather than a fully-developed discourse. Although the two parables differ in several ways, they do have a common theme: faithfulness in using the resources given by the master for his purposes. In the first parable, the emphasis is on faithfulness regardless of the gifts entrusted to them; in the second, the emphasis is on the diligence of the servant, given the same gifts.

In each parable, the third servant proved unfaithful in using the master’s resources. Considering the nature of parables, these servants serve better as a literary device to build the story rather than an example of a fruitless believer. Jesus portrays the extremes in each parable: Great faithfulness; great reward. No faithfulness, no reward. By using the exaggeration of no fruit, Jesus makes his point about the high cost of poor choices. Neither story intends to show the reality (or lack thereof) of the fruitless believer.

THE FRUIT AND THE VINE (JOHN 15:1-11)

Grape vineyards were—and are—common in Israel. Jesus uses this natural illustration to teach His disciples about fruitfulness. The two keys are the work of the Father, the vinedresser (John 15:1), and the necessity of the connection between the vine and the branches (abiding in Him). In this illustration, two branches might portray the fruitless believer: the branch in Him that does not bear fruit (15:2) and the branch that does not abide in Him and is cast into the fire (15:6). However, neither of these serve as evidence of a fruitless believer. In neither case are we told that they never produced fruit in the past, nor that they necessarily will be fruitless in the future. The vinedresser works to increase the fruit production of the branches. Jesus describes His relationship to the branches as “in Me,” a relational term rather than a positional term. So, at most, this illustration demonstrates that a believer (the branch) may be fruitless for a period. It says nothing about his or her past or future fruitfulness.

THE THIEF ON THE CROSS (LUKE 23:39-43)

What about the person who believes on his or her deathbed? The closest example we have in Scripture is the thief on the cross. Matthew 27:44 and Mark 15:32 each report that the others crucified with Jesus initially insulted him. But Luke paints a change in the demeanor of one of the thieves. He reports that when one of the criminals hurled insults at Jesus, the second one responded by acknowledging their guilt and Jesus’ innocence. He then asks Jesus to remember him when Jesus comes into His kingdom, Jesus responds by telling him that He will be with Jesus in Paradise that very day. It was only a matter of hours after this that the criminal died. This response of Jesus confirms that this man believed sometime between the events recorded by the other synoptic writers and Luke’s account. The words of this criminal

demonstrate that some change happened in him, producing the fruit of his words defending Jesus. So, this account cannot defend the idea of a fruitless believer, even on his or her deathbed.

SIMON THE SORCERER (ACTS 8:9-24)

Simon claimed to be someone great because of his magic and the attention he received because of that magic. When Philip came to Samaria proclaiming the good news, “they” (many in the city) believed, and even Simon “believed.” He then was baptized, but after witnessing Peter and John bestowing the Holy Spirit on believers by laying on of hands (Acts 8:17), Simon tried giving them money for the same authority (Acts 18-19). Peter sharply rebuked Simon, in his last words recorded in the Bible, asks Peter for prayer “so that nothing of what you have said may come upon me” (Acts 8:24). We know nothing beyond this of Simon’s life. Was he fruitless? It seems not. He was baptized and “continued on” with Philip after his conversion. The signs and miracles Simon saw amazed him, so, at least on the surface, he had an interest in spiritual things. But even if these were not “genuine” fruit, we know nothing else of his post-conversion life except this snapshot of his encounter with Peter. We cannot say with certainty that there was no fruit later in his life.

BUILDING WITH WOOD, HAY, AND STUBBLE (1 COR 3:8-15)

What about the man whose work is “burned up” yet will be saved (1 Cor 3:15)? Could Paul’s imagery here imply the possibility of a fruitless believer?

In First Corinthians 3:12, Paul describes two different qualities of work which people can use for building on the foundation of Jesus Christ: gold, silver, and precious stones (fruit) or wood, hay, and straw. He pictures the judgment seat of Christ as testing these works by fire at the Judgment Seat of Christ. One set of these building materials cannot stand up to the fire and will be “burned up.” Paul adds, however, that the one whose work is burned up, will be saved. In other words, loss of reward does not imply loss of one’s justification.

The question arises, does this second man represent an actual fruitless believer or even a hypothetical one? Look at the structure of the two sentences in the passage:

If any man’s work (εἴ τις ἔργον) ... remains (1 Cor 3:13)

If any man’s work (εἴ τις ἔργον) ... is burned up (1 Cor 3:14)

Notice the first clause is identical in each sentence. If the second sentence speaks of a fruitless believer (the entirety of his or her work is burned up), then the structure would indicate an identical situation for the

first case: the entirety of that believer’s work remains. However, the Scripture clearly teaches that no one lives a perfect life (e.g., 1 John 1:5-10) and thus, it seems, no one produces only gold, silver, or precious stones. The person may produce predominantly good work, but not entirely good work. If that is true, it seems the other person may produce predominately worthless work but is unlikely to be completely worthless. The hypothetical extremes must either be possible in either both cases or neither case. Paul here uses hyperbole to paint the extremes. Paul’s words “he himself will be saved,” says less about the existence of the fruitless believer than about the security of the believer regardless of how much of his (or her) work burns.

WHAT ABOUT THE HYPOTHETICAL CASE?

No one can know if another person is truly fruitless in this life. And the Bible provides no clear examples of a fruitless believer. But can we still say that such a believer hypothetically exists?

Hypothetical cases are notoriously problematic. Chiefly, the problem lies in failing to account for the actions of every player in the hypothetical situation. In this case, we have more than one player: the believer and the Lord. If we considered only the actions of the believer, then the hypothetical case of a squandered, fruitless life is possible. However, the second person in the equation—God Himself—plays a role in the new life of the believer. He makes the person a new creature (2 Cor 5:17). He transfers the believer from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of His beloved Son (Col 1:13). He seals and indwells the believer with the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13, 1 Cor 12:13). He changes the believer’s position from being dead in sin to being in Christ, sin no longer the person’s legal master (Col 3:1-3, Rom 5:1-7), plus more. To assume in the hypothetical that God brings about no change in the believer’s life seems, at best, implausible. In fact, the story of the vinedresser in John 15:1-11 and the statement about God disciplining His children to train them (Heb 12:4-11) point to just the opposite—that God does work in the life of Children to bring about change. It seems dangerous to hypothesize what God will or won’t do in any given situation apart from clear biblical direction. Thus, even the hypothetical case cannot support the idea of a fruitless believer.

CONCLUSION

The search for the “fruitless believer” came up empty. The Scriptures provide no clear examples of any. Nor does life provide any provable examples. And the hypothetical case requires hypothesizing what God will (or won’t) do in a person’s life. Thus, the best conclusion seems to be that every believer will produce some fruit in his or her life. This position does not imply a believer will necessarily persevere in bearing fruit until the end of life (contra Dortian Calvinism), nor does it imply anything about the quantity of fruit. And under no circumstances does this fruit, regardless of how much or how little, provide evidence of the reality of one’s faith. The Scriptures make it clear that a person is saved when he or she believes in Jesus (e.g., John 3:16), is secure because of the work of the Trinity on his or her behalf (Eph 1:3-14), and is assured based on the objective truth of Jesus death and resurrection and the promises of the Scripture (e.g., 1 John 5:13).

Some opponents of Free Grace argue that “you say a person can produce no fruit ever and still be born again.” A Free Grace person may answer, “It is impossible to know if such a person even exists. We hold the believer will produce at least some fruit, but such fruit is never, ever, the proof of one’s salvation.”



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