

“The Normal Christian Life – From the Mountain Tops of Liberty, Part 2”

Review: The Normal Christian Life, From the Mountain Tops of Liberty

- **Paul’s Two Teachings Explain the “Way”, and the “How”, of Grace Living**

- In our last study, we began a two-part overview of the Pauline teaching on the Normal Christian Life. I titled our studies “The Normal Christian Life,” by taking from the title of Watchman Nee’s most well-known book of the same title.
- The Normal Christian Life is, as we saw last time, that way of living that is according to God’s heavenly standard. And what our apostle writes about at great length is that standard, according to the riches of God’s grace that we are privileged to enjoy today.

For after salvation by grace through faith itself, our living by faith under the principles of grace is most important to our Lord God and should be, therefore, also for ourselves.

- What have we learned in our studies here on this topic?

Firstly, the “Way” of this living out of our eternal life is explained by the Know - Reckon - Yield (or Present) teaching found in Romans chapter 6. In those verses, Paul teaches what we must comprehend if we are to live our lives to the heavenly standard of grace that God has chosen for us today. Verses 3 - 10 present that teaching, and it is critical for us to know it, he writes, in words as pointed as this.

Verses 9 & 10 summarize that teaching:

Romans 6:9-10

9 **Knowing** that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him.

10 For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God.

- This knowledge is so very important. For everything in our living as believers should honor what our Lord is honoring as stated so forcefully here, and that is the risen and ascended Christ. For he has fully and completely paid the penalty for our sin and sins and is now seated at the right hand of the Father. The Holy Spirit has been sent forth to dwell within us all and to provide the empowering we must rely upon for victorious living. But as verse

11 refers back to that teaching with the word “likewise reckon”, that knowledge is essential, or we cannot live according to the grace standard. It is that simple.

Romans 6:11 **Likewise reckon [count it to be true]** ye also yourselves to be dead [*having died*] indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

- So, just as Christ himself is now living not in relation to the sin, but only in relation to Almighty God, so also we may and should do likewise. That is the point of this gracious exhortation. Now, the yielding or presenting of ourselves to God for his use and glory is stated in that gracious exhortation of verses 12 & 13:

Rom. 6:12-13

12 **Let not [stop allowing]** sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.

13 Neither **yield [continue to present]** ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but **yield [begin to present]** yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.

- So, having reckoned accordingly, we are now seeking an opportunity to present ourselves to our loving God through our step-by-step living. For indeed, he states so affirmatively, we are alive from the dead, and our members are instruments of righteousness now instead of what they were when we were unregenerate sinners.
- Then, we considered the “How” of the living out of our eternal life. This has to do with the explanation of what is happening within us that enables our victory over that otherwise irresistible force of sin. When we understand the way that the Lord has engineered our victory over our enemies in this life, one of the greatest being our indwelling nature of sin, we are encouraged to live according to the principles outlined there.

Galatians 5:16-17

16 This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.

17 For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.

- The solution again is pure simplicity itself, for it is found in our “walking in the Spirit” or, better yet, perhaps, “by the Spirit”.

These words are a placeholder for the Romans' teaching, of course, the Know-Reckon-Yield (or Present) teaching. For that outlines our entire way of deliverance, practically speaking, from the otherwise dominating power of the sin nature still dwelling within us all.

- The teaching is simply this: While (and only then, as) we are walking in harmony with the Spirit, the battle is the Lord's and he is victorious in freeing us from the dominion and power of the flesh. We are set free from its controlling power and freed to carry out the desires of the new nature, also dwelling within us. The fruit of the Spirit is thereby brought forth, looking for opportunities to work. All that the Father is desiring, through our indwelling new nature, is the Spirit's focus.

This harmonious walking is what Paul writes so much about when he writes that we should be constantly setting our minds on things above, or redeeming the time, or having the mindset of Christ, and so on. It is taking God at his word as Romans 6 details so wonderfully in those early verses. The Know-Reckon-Present follows naturally, therefore. The risen, ascended, and victorious Lord is thereby honored for his glorious workings through the cross and now, moment by moment, amen.

- So here we see the answer to the "how" question in its glorious essence: the Holy Spirit is the answer. He dwells within every believer due to our redemption, and his many works are evident, specifically here, this great work regarding our indwelling sin nature and its many demands.
- Red flags are noted, though, proving our failure to walk by the Spirit. In this case, other works of the Spirit are manifested, such as conviction and grieving, given graciously to those believers who are still engaged in fleshly concerns.

And he then, in chapter 5, contrasts the works of the flesh that manifest themselves as we fail to walk harmoniously with the Spirit, with the fruit of the Spirit, which reveals the new nature with its desires. Those, of course, are always in agreement with the will and purpose of Almighty God, and no law of God can condemn them; therefore, verse 23.

And then, what follows as the Spirit's fruit is manifested? Good works, of course, follow, as the night the day, as it were. For that is the normal result. The Normal Christian Life brings forth fruit unto God and glorifies him. Many verses speak to that. For

example, Ephesians 2:10; 1 Corinthians 15:10, 58; 2 Corinthians 9:8; 1 Timothy 2:10, 5:10, 6:11; 2 Timothy 3:17; Titus 2:7, 14; 3:8. One that stands out that we have looked at before is this:

Titus 2:11-15

11 For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men,

12 Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;

13 Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ;

14 Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

15 These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee.

- It is clear in the rest of that chapter that Paul intends for the power of his written word to make the much-needed difference in the lives of the believers there. He is so confident of that, isn't he? You might wonder how he could be, considering what he knew of their condition spiritually.

Woe to those who turn away from Paul and those teachers who never draw their hearers to him and his word of grace. Or, beware of those who do go to Pauline truth but then try to merge works of law back in somehow. For this is so common. The book stores are overflowing with titles promoting new forms of supposed spirituality, none of which are new at all. But Paul, in his teachings, exposes the dangers of them all so powerfully as we have been seeing.

Our Outline for Today: The Normal Christian Life, From the Mountain Tops of Liberty

- ***Our Liberty In Christ Is Founded Upon God's Abundant Grace***
- ***Our Position In Christ Jesus By God's Grace In Christ Is Foundational***
- ***Paul's Dispensational Teaching Is Of Critical Importance For Us Today***

I. Our Liberty In Christ Is Founded Upon God's Abundant Grace:

- “The Normal Christian Life, From the Mountain Tops of Liberty” is our title today in this final study on this topic. Paul is focused like a microscope on the law in both Galatians and Romans, and for good reason. For when legalism is promoted in the assemblies, the consequence may be more than in our carnality, for the purity of the gospel itself is at risk. He writes of that at the beginning of the letter showing a central reason why this letter was written and underscoring the letter’s critical importance. If only preachers and teachers were so motivated.

[READ] Galatians 2:1-5

1 Then fourteen years after I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and took Titus with *me* also.

2 And I went up by revelation, and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain.

3 But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised:

4 And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage:

5 To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.

- However, though grace for salvation is in some sense accepted by many, when the subject changes to our living, it seems to be just too much, and legalisms often are presented as solutions to our fleshly weaknesses. Those teachings are often promoted through lies which abound, such as, “without the restraints of law, grace promotes lawlessness or evil”, or, “too much grace is dangerous, since “easy-believism”, so-called, is often the result.” When asked which laws are preferred, no answers are often forthcoming, for that clearly often depends on the groups with which one is associated.
- Damaging doctrines are also often promoted, such as “lordship salvation”. That doctrine emphasizes the degree of one’s faith, subjectively determined, of course, in the place of the content of one’s faith, which can only be derived from what has been believed.
- For Paul, though, the issue really is this: How much was accomplished in Christ’s death for our sin and sins, in his burial, and in his resurrection? And how much of that do we have today, and in what way has that been accomplished? For we are on a journey, and it makes the greatest of differences where one begins it. The whole character of the journey is defined by its starting place and its endpoints.

- An illustration will help with our understanding. For the Normal Christian Life, our apostle Paul says we are starting on the higher elevations and not in the deepest valleys! We are enjoying the whole mountain from that vantage point, not from the bottom, hoping we might, by some means (perhaps unknown), make it to the top and then back down again safely. We are exploring the heavenlies! Yes, our feet are planted here, but he has and does and will make the difference, for it is only by faith that we stand.
 - He writes like we are mountain dwellers from the beginning and accustomed to living there at that high altitude. Valley or city dwellers are not so equipped. But we exhorted to be like the sherpas in India and Nepal who have lived their entire lives at a higher elevation. For them, climbing even higher is not nearly the challenge it is for us city dwellers. Likewise, our journey is to be glorious indeed, exploring all the riches he provides and scaling to heights we never could have reached otherwise.

And it is all because of Christ's completed work for us sinners. For it makes such a difference where one starts a journey. It makes the difference between victory and defeat. Our journey must start in the heavenlies to reach the mountain tops which are glorious beyond our comprehension.

Our spiritual well-being depends upon this truth, not subtle, and yet largely still unknown, for so many have abandoned the Pauline teaching which is so unique and essential for us, under grace.

II. Our Position In Christ Jesus By God's Grace In Christ Is Foundational:

- As a beginning serious student of God's Word, I became acquainted with the distinction between the scriptural truths regarding our position in Christ and other truths about our condition as believers. That difference is important, and its understanding can be life-changing indeed, as I can testify. Miles Stanford was one of those authors I had been reading. Only a few of his books and pamphlets are still in print and available today. "The Green Letters" is the name of one I recommend.
- Our "position" is our blessings possessed due to the free gift of God and secured eternally for us all through the finished work of Christ. Those are ours to enjoy and are foundational to our salvation and our life. They are the "facts" regarding our special place as God's children under grace. Our "condition", on the other hand, refers to what we are demonstrating now, moment by moment, in our living. It often does not compare with our position, therefore. One can, as mentioned earlier, practice idolatry

and not be an idolater, for example. Believers are seen by God as righteous in Christ Jesus. That is because we are seen with Christ's own righteousness imputed as our own or added to our own personal accounts. And that is bound up essentially with our sins having been fully paid for through his shed blood and death for our sakes.

- In our last study we stopped at Galatians 5:24 where I promised to explain Paul's meaning there:

Galatians 5:22-24

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,

23 Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

24 And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.

- In this verse, Paul states a truth for us all, as believers. For not only some of us, perhaps the more spiritual, or as many might add, the more obedient, but all of us "are Christ's" and therefore as he writes most wonderfully, "we have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts." This is a statement of fact and is true as stated — from our Lord God's perspective. That is the clear meaning of this statement, both in the Greek and in our English translation.

It does much disservice to the God of the Bible to, in effect, change words in the sacred text as so many do. They want to change this to a command, thereby both denying the full reality of Christ's work in us while also placing all believers back under "some kind of spiritual" law. In truth, every exhortation for us found in Paul's letters is a gracious exhortation. All are based on the truths concerning our position in Christ and can never contradict those truths.

The question of when that crucifixion of verse 24 occurred is an important one. How would Paul answer it? Well, he already has, in Romans 6, in the verses leading up to the Know-Reckon-Yield section we now know so well:

[READ] Romans 6:3-5

3 Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?

4 Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

5 For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also *in the likeness of his* resurrection:

[READ] Romans 6:6-8

6 Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with *him*, that the body of sin might be destroyed [*or rendered powerless*], that henceforth we should not serve sin.

7 For he that is dead is freed from sin.

8 Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him:

- Those are the verses leading to the ones we have focused on in Romans again today. The truths stated there are truths concerning our Lord Jesus, and also regarding ourselves, as God sees us. Verse 6 says quite affirmatively in a Greek past tense that as believers, we have all been crucified with Christ, with consequences that are essential for our understanding.

“Baptism” is the key word used here in several ways:

- We have all been baptized into Jesus Christ
 - We have all been baptized into his death
 - We have all been buried with him by baptism into Christ’s death
- So Paul concludes that due to the spiritual reality of this saving work of the Spirit for us, “our old man has even been crucified with him”, removing the power of the sin nature to rule over us as it previously did. Now, as a result, we may live above and beyond the carnal nature’s demands that were previously irresistible.
 - Verse 7 gives us much food for thought: “For he that is dead is freed [*or justified*] from sin.” There is so much teaching here in only a few words. For the essence of Pauline grace is displayed in this teaching most wonderfully.
 - Those teaching that we can find water baptism in these verses effectively destroy Paul’s meaning entirely. For he is writing here of that spiritual work of the Spirit of God that accompanies our act of saving faith. It has nothing at all to do with a religious water ritual, nor with some kind of after salvation spiritual experience as many believe.
 - Paul also powerfully writes of this spiritual baptism in Galatians 3:

Galatians 3:26-29

26 For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.

27 For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

29 And if ye *be* Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

- Here the incomparable spiritual work of identifying us with Christ in his death, in his burial, and in his resurrection has been described as the putting on of a garment. This is surely true for all believers as stated here, for we are all members of Christ, members of his Body Church.
- This reference concerns the Holy Spirit's ministry of connecting us to Christ and to Christ's Body Church of which he himself is the head. Other scripture says even more of this real transaction which, though spiritual in nature, has benefits that we should never take for granted as believers. One of those describes our new "reality" in Christ Jesus like this:

1 Corinthians 12:13 For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether *we be* Jews or Gentiles, whether *we be* bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.

- This baptism is real therefore, not a symbol or mark of something else as so many teachers would like us to believe. And the entire life of a believer living under abundant grace is based directly upon it. This baptism does indeed save us in a full sense of the word.
- So, two complementary teachings are found here regarding deliverance from the power of sin in our lives, resulting in the full benefit and enjoyment of the Normal Christian Life:
 - The "way" shown so clearly in the Romans letter gives the method for victorious living under grace.
 - The "how" found in the Galatians letter provides the explanation of the success of God's method or way as revealed in the Romans. For only that way can be effective, as all other ways are based on some sort of law with the required works and not therefore on grace. And that is the subject of the Galatian letter. He calls that way the "walk by the Spirit" in Galatians 5:16.

Living one's life in harmony with what the Spirit of God is doing

gives the victory since it is the Spirit of God that is doing the real work, as verse 17 explains.

III. Paul's Dispensational Teaching Is Of Critical Importance For Us Today:

- The Pauline teaching regarding the gospel of the grace of God and the walk of the believer under that same grace is essential for our understanding as believers. Without a dispensational understanding, however, one runs the risk of trying to harmonize law and grace, effectively destroying both in the process. For the two cannot be mixed as our apostle wrote so definitively:

[READ] Romans 11:5-6

5 Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace.

6 And if by grace, then *is it* no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if *it be* of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.

- So much depends on taking God at his word. That means we carefully study and compare scripture with scripture, seeing the parallels and the clear differences.

The key principle for us today is this: As believers, we are not under the law but under grace. Our lives are a training ground encouraging us to increasingly comprehend the depths of meaning (and therefore also then the blessing) contained in those few words. For this life is a preparation for eternity. Amen.

- The greatest question for today, then, is this: Will we take God at his word and live by faith that it is true? Romans 6 is so clear if we would only receive it. Christ is no longer focused on sin but on new life. Law always stands in the way, therefore, as our apostle writes so forcefully.

From the highest, heavenly level, Paul writes of this in this manner in Romans 5:

Romans 5:17, 20-21

17 For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.)

...

20 Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound:

21 That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord. *[The consequences of this are astounding. Just consider it carefully.]*

Regarding our salvation, he does not mince his words either:

Galatians 2:21 I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness *come* by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.

Similarly, regarding our living our of this abundant grace, he writes thus:

[READ] Romans 6:16-19

16 Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?

17 But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.

18 Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.

19 I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness.

- There is much precious grace truth here. The next verses closing the chapter emphasize our liberty from sin in contrast to our former bondage to it:

Romans 6:20-23

20 For when ye were the servants of sin, **ye were free from righteousness.**

21 What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things *is* death.

22 **But now being made free from sin,** and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.

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

Some Final Conclusions:

- Do we stand today on the firm bedrock of unlimited grace, or not? That is our question as we close out this study on the Normal Christian Life. The good news concerning our sins fully paid for in Christ's death led us to salvation; the good news regarding our spiritual living leads us to a life of rejoicing and victory. Praise God!
 - What Our New Life in Christ Is: Taking God at his word by faith when it comes to our living. For that, we must KNOW what he has said. And then RECKON upon it. Then the power of the sin within has been quenched by the Spirit, and we are free to serve God in the Spirit by

bearing forth his fruit in continual honor of him.

- We are so privileged in our Lord Jesus. All three persons of the Trinity indwell us and we are the recipients of the glorious benefits of the fullness of God's workings, under grace. We have been baptized into his death, his burial, and his resurrection, with so many benefits of that already provided and so many more available.

In the end, this is all about all that has been accomplished in Christ's death, burial, and resurrection, and seeing that not only our eternity but also our present living are encompassed by that. That is most wonderful and all according to his unlimited and glorious grace poured out freely on sinners such as we ourselves once were.

But we are all now on the path of glory, and nothing can change that. It truly is that simple.

[This concludes our studies on The Normal Christian Life, as seen from on high, From the Mountain Tops of Liberty. Amen.]