

THE TRUE GOSPEL

by Bonnie Ricks

In Galatians 1:6-9 NIV, the Apostle Paul said, "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel - which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!"

"Eternally condemned" ... that's strong language, isn't it? But Paul had a very good reason to speak so strongly against those who preach a different gospel from the one he preached... if someone hears, believes and follows a "different gospel," that person is just as lost as someone who has no beliefs at all. Jesus, Himself, said this same thing in John 8:24 NIV, when He said, "I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins." In other words, if you do not believe Jesus is who He says He is, you are just as lost as a person who does not believe at all.

The purpose of this article is to let you know just who Jesus claimed to be, along with all the other points of the gospel that are so important – points that, if someone changes them or teaches them incorrectly, that person will be eternally condemned – and those following their false teachings are lost.

Let's start with the basics... When a carpenter starts to build something, he first lays down a "plumb line" – a line that he refers to over and over again as he builds his project in order to keep the whole project "true." As people, we also need a "plumb line" for our lives – somewhere that we can go where we know that we will always find the truth. That "plumb line" is the Bible. There is no other book that contains consistent, solid, infallible truth, and there is no other ancient book that has so much evidence for its reliability. Written over a period of 1,500 years by some 40 prophets/authors, and covering a time span of over 2,500 years, the writings do not contradict themselves! Few of the men who wrote the books of the Bible – especially those writing the Old Testament - knew each other, and yet they do not contradict one another.

God was so careful to protect His word, that He made use of more than one way to convey His word so that we, today, can avail ourselves of its truths. For instance, there are some 24,000+ ancient manuscripts or pieces of manuscripts of the New Testament alone. And yet, if all of those manuscripts were somehow lost or destroyed, and if, at the same time, every copy of the New Testament was somehow lost or destroyed, we could reconstruct the entire New Testament – except for 12 verses – by using the letters of the early church fathers!

There is much more to be said in defense of the infallibility of the Bible and its position as our "plumb line" for truth, but we won't go into those here. There are several superb books on the subject, so if you doubt the reliability of the Bible, I would suggest that you get a copy of one or both of the following books and read them carefully:

Evidence that Demands a Verdict (either edition) by Josh McDowell

God's Word: Final, Infallible and Forever by Floyd McElveen

Now, let's look at some of the basic doctrines of Christianity, the ones which are most often perverted by those who preach a different gospel. The first of these is the nature of God...

According to the leading expert on God's Nature – Jesus – “God is spirit.” (John 4:24a NIV) “...and His worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.” (John 4:24b NIV) God is unique in that He alone has a long list of divine characteristics – none of which are possessed by human beings. *For a full list of all the divine attributes of God, see “Appendix A” below.*

The interesting thing is that Jesus has all of the same attributes, but with one difference—He took on a physical body when He came to earth. He came to earth to be the final sacrifice for our sins, to teach us the truth, and to show us God. “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.” (John 14:9 NIV)

In John 10:11, Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down His life for His sheep.” Jesus often referred to Himself as a shepherd. Perhaps because, even today, the image of a shepherd is one that depicts comfort, security, peace and love. There is nothing so tender as a shepherd caring for his sheep. In this instance, He says He is the “good shepherd”, who will lay down His life for His sheep. Never again would man have to offer a blood sacrifice for any sin. Jesus' sacrifice was the ultimate, the complete and the final sacrifice.

Beginning in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:21), when God killed an animal and made clothing for Adam and Eve, God began to show us that the only thing that will “cover” sin is a blood sacrifice. Later, when God sent the final plague to Egypt – the slaying of the firstborn of all humans and animals alike – it was the blood of perfect one-year-old lambs, spread over the sides and tops of the doorframes of the Hebrews, which protected the people of Israel from the Angel of Death. On that night, God established the Passover feast – the meat of the slaughtered lambs was to be roasted, and a portion given to each person in the household. They would eat the meat, along with bitter herbs, and unleavened (made without yeast) bread, and drink red wine. Later, the unleavened bread and red wine would be used by Jesus to symbolize His sinless body (the unleavened bread), and His blood shed in sacrifice (the red wine), and establish the Sacrament, or Communion, or Lord's Supper that we celebrate today as Christians.

After their exodus from Egypt, and while the Hebrews were wandering in the wilderness, God established a priesthood, made up solely of the descendants of Levi. Sometimes called the Levitical Priesthood or the Priesthood of Aaron (named for Moses' brother, Aaron, who was the first high priest), these men would act as “mediators” between God and men. These men were consecrated as Priests, given very elaborate garments to wear, and given specific instructions as to their roles as mediators (Exodus 28 & 29). Then God told Moses to build the Tabernacle (Exodus chapters 25-27, 30, 35-40) – a “portable Temple” (built sometime between the 15th and 13th centuries B.C.) which the Hebrews carried with them throughout their wanderings, and

which was continued to be used for many, many years as the place where the hundreds of animals were sacrificed for the sins of the people.

God revealed the plans for the Temple to David (1 Chronicles 28:11-19), but told David that he would not be the one to build the temple because God did not want a warrior to build His Temple. After Solomon (David's son through Bathsheba) became King, God instructed Solomon to build the Temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 5 – 8), and from the day that incredibly beautiful building was constructed until 70 A.D., it would be the place where all Jews would come to offer perfect lambs and doves so that the priests could make blood sacrifices to cover the people's sins. Scripture tells us that God appointed construction of the tabernacle (and later, the temple) because of His desire to dwell among His people (Exodus 25:8; 1 Kings 6:12,13). However, in its design and activities, the temple emphasized the separation of sinful man from God and the difficulty in approaching His divine presence under the old covenant. Only priests could enter the temple sanctuary. The sanctuary had two rooms: an outer chamber, called the "Holy Place," and an inner room, the "Holy of Holies," which was separated from it by a massive veil. Worshippers could enter neither; they came no further than the altar of burnt offering in the courtyard. Only the Levitical priests entered the temple, where they ministered in the holy place on behalf of the people. The Holy of Holies was the place of God's special presence. Only the high priest could go behind the massive Temple veil, and he could do that only one time a year on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur, Leviticus 16:2,34; Hebrews 9:7). What he did there is spelled out in detail in Leviticus 16:2-34.

On the day that Jesus was crucified everything changed. At the moment of Jesus' death, God Himself tore the Temple veil in two from top to bottom – an action that was impossible for men to do. The Temple veil was a massive, intricately woven tapestry about 14 inches thick! It was so strong that it was said that two teams of oxen pulling in opposite directions could not even put a wrinkle in it! But God made short work of that massive veil, in a symbolic act that said to the Hebrews – and to all of mankind – that no longer would anyone need a priesthood to mediate between him/her and God Almighty. From that moment forward, there would be "...one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus," (1 Timothy 2:5b NIV). Then, God pushed His agenda forward even further by allowing the Temple to be destroyed in 70 A.D. There was no more need for a Temple, because there was no more need for blood sacrifice. Jesus had become the FINAL blood sacrifice, ending for all time the need for a Temple or for the slaughter of thousands of lambs and doves. Three days after Jesus died on the cross, God's plan of salvation was completed when Jesus rose from the dead, conquering death and hell forever for all who will believe.

All who will believe... That's another important point in the true gospel... that ALL who will believe will be saved. Salvation does not require membership in any particular church. Religion is manmade – man's feeble attempt to reach up to God. Christianity is a relationship – completing God's magnificent act of reaching down to man. When we are born, we are part of God's creation. When we accept Jesus' free gift of salvation by faith alone, we are adopted into God's family, a part of the Body of Christ. "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it." (1 Corinthians 12:27 NIV) When the New Testament refers to "the church," it is speaking of the Body of Christ, which is made up of every born again believer who has ever lived or who ever will live.

All who believe... that phrase carries with it yet another important aspect of what it means to be a Christian. In John 6:28 NIV, the people asked Jesus, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" His answer in verse 29 is vitally important for all of us to understand. Jesus said, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent." That's it. Just believe... believe that Jesus is who He says He is and that He died to save you from your sins... AND that is it. There is not one thing that you or I can do to make God love us any more or any less than He already does. There is not one thing you or I can do to make ourselves "worthy" enough to go to heaven. "...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," (Romans 3:23 NIV) If we try to achieve heaven through "good works," we are wasting our time because all of our "good works" are like "filthy rags" to God (Isaiah 64:6). Rather, the ONLY thing that will save us is faith in Jesus Christ. "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 2:8-9 NIV)

This concept is, perhaps, the most difficult one for any of us to comprehend because we have a hard time believing that anything as important as eternal life can't possibly be "free." However, it IS free – for us – but it was bought at a terrible price. Jesus suffered more in the last 24 hours of His life than any of us could ever comprehend... and He did so because of His incomprehensible and unconditional love for each and every one of us. He did so because not one of us is capable of being "worthy" of attaining heaven, no matter how many good works we do or how closely we follow God's Commandments. Perhaps Paul said it best when he said, "I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing." (Galatians 2:21 NIV) *If you would like to know more about God's amazing grace, see "Appendix B" below.*

Besides God's grace, one last thing has been perverted – or ignored or ridiculed – by many who do not understand it, and that one thing is the cross. Some ridicule the Christian focus on the cross, saying, "If Jesus Christ had been killed with a gun, would you wear a gun around your neck or stand one up at the front of your sanctuaries?" My answer is "YES!"

As misunderstood as it may have been, the cross was God demonstrating His love for us... in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Jesus did not die by some plot of the Gentile or Jew. Speaking of His life, Jesus said, "No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord." (John 10:18 NIV) He said that He would "give his life as a ransom for many." (Matthew 20:28b NIV) And so He did. He who knew no sin took upon Himself the sin of all mankind and its judgment upon that cross that He might bring us to God.

It was love, the unerring love of God, which brought the many prophecies of scripture to precise fulfillment. On a specific day marked on heaven's calendar, and in a specific place marked on earth's map, the Son of God came to dwell among us. It was love that prompted the Son of God to show compassion to the sick, the distressed and the sin-burdened. It was love that enabled Jesus Christ to become "poor, that (we) through His poverty might be rich." (2 Corinthians 8:9 NIV) It was love, divine love, that made Him "endure the cross, despising the shame" (Hebrews 12:2 NIV) ... that made Him endure the contradictions of sinners against Himself.

It was love that restrained Him when He was falsely accused of blasphemy and was led to Golgotha to die with common thieves; He raised not a hand against His enemies. It was love that kept Him from calling legions of angels to come to His defense. It was love that, after such torture devised by degenerate man had been heaped upon Him, caused Him to lift His voice and pray, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." (Luke 23:34 NIV) It was love which made Him, in a moment of agonizing death, give life to a repentant sinner who cried, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." (Luke 23:42 NIV)

From Genesis to Revelation, from earth's greatest tragedy to heaven's greatest triumph, the dramatic story of mankind's lowest depths and of God's highest heights can be couched in 25 words: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16 NIV)

APPENDIX A

The Divine Attributes of God

- **Supremacy** – He is THE Supreme Being. He is not merely a different type of being or a superior being, but the Supreme Being.
- **Uniqueness** – God is unique. The Bible describes Him in Greek as monogenesis – which means “one of a kind,” “having a unique nature,” etc. There is only ONE God, and He tells us so 27 different times in the Bible.
- **Eternalness** – He has always existed and always will exist. He had no beginning and will never cease to exist.
- **Omniscience** – He knows all things.
- **Omnipotence** – He is all powerful.
- **Omnipresence** – He is everywhere at the same time.
- **Self-Existent** – He is the only thing that had no beginning, that was not created by something else.
- **Holiness** – He is pure and undefiled.
- **Triune** – The one God is a single “Trinity” consisting of three distinct persons:
 1. God the Father
 2. God the Son (Jesus, who is also sometimes referred to as “the Word of God”)
 3. God the Holy Spirit

NOTE: Don't get hung up on the “how can one be three” question at this point. Keep in mind that we are finite, imperfect beings trying to comprehend an infinite, perfect God. We can't wrap our minds around the Trinity, but we can accept it because God says that is His nature, and He says so from Genesis to Revelation. And, while we might not be able to comprehend His Triune nature, we can get to know Him through Jesus who came to earth as God Incarnate for several reasons: to save us from our sins, to teach us God's truth, and to help us get to know God on an intimate, personal level.

- **Theistic** – There are two types of gods as defined by comparative religion: deistic and theistic. A deistic god is one that would distance itself from that which it creates, one that would not get involved in the activities of the thing it created. A deistic god would essentially be an “absentee father” god – it would create a universe and then sit back and say, “I made you, but I don’t want to get involved. You’re on your own!” The God of the Bible is theistic. He does NOT distance Himself from that which He creates. He gets actively involved in the activities of the things He created. In fact, the God of the Bible “micromanages” His creation.
- **Transcendent** – God transcends that which He created, i.e. He goes beyond that which He created. He is not limited to that which He created. He is not bound by that which He created. For example, in the physical universe it is impossible for a single being to consist of three distinct persons, but God is not limited by physical laws, so He CAN be ONE God and yet consist of three distinct persons.
- **Alive** – God is a living being. Even more so, Jesus Christ, who died for our sins, rose from the grave and is alive! And He sits at the right hand of the Father 24/7/365 interceding on behalf of those who accept His free gift of salvation.
- **Personal** – God is a living person with thoughts, reactions, emotions, etc., not an impersonal thing.
- **Spirit** – As we said above, God is spirit. A spirit is a living being that is incorporeal, i.e. it does not possess a physical body. Jesus took on a physical body, but that body did not compromise His nature. By comparison, our bodies are part of our human nature, but we put on clothes.
- **Intelligent** – This is a given, considering He created the entire universe all the way from the largest planet down to the most microscopic microbe. His intelligence and imagination are limitless.
- **Immortal** – God will live forever. Note the technical difference between eternal and immortal. God is eternal because He had no beginning. He is immortal because He will live forever. In the alternative, human beings are immortal because we will live forever, but we are NOT eternal because we did not always exist.
- **Separate** – God is separate from that which He created. The universe itself is NOT God. God is NOT “in” trees and rocks and oceans and feathers. He exists outside of His creation, and He sees past, present and future all at the same time.

APPENDIX B

God's Amazing Grace - Galatians 1:3

Paul, the Apostle, regularly began each of his letters with an introduction of who he was and who he was writing to. Then he would say, "Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Why would this thing - grace - be so important for Paul to include it in the very beginning of virtually every letter he wrote? Because the grace of God is the most important thing that any of us will ever receive.

But God's grace - this one thing that is so important - is also perhaps the most difficult concept for us to understand. It is something for which we have no point of reference in our own lives. It doesn't fit in with our human conception of reality. Perhaps that is why God began to teach us about Himself by first giving us a list of rules to live by -- the Law of Moses. By giving men these laws (over 600 of them!), God began to illustrate how truly impossible it is for any man to live by them. Through thousands of years and countless lives, God illustrated how very much we all need His grace. And then, through Jesus, the laws became guidelines to live by. Through Jesus, the laws became a standard, not an achievement ladder for

obtaining grace. Through Jesus, we use the law to understand what sin is, not as a means of obtaining righteousness. Paul reiterated this concept again and again, but perhaps he said it best in Romans 3:20 (NIV), "Therefore no one will be declared righteous in His sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin."

Rules and regulations make us comfortable. We know what we can do and when we can do it. We know what we can't do and what will happen to us if we do. This gives us a feeling of security. But God's grace... now, there's something scary... risky... insecure. You and I don't want to be dependent on anyone for anything, even God. So we keep our rules and regulations and merely flavor them with grace. We want to keep God 90% in control, with us 10% in control... just in case. So if God fails to come through with his 90%, we can step in and somehow influence Him to get back on the job!

But God is not a puppet. He is not someone we can control by our wit or charm. We can't influence how much grace He pours on us by doing only those things that tickle His fancy. We cannot manipulate God by trying to follow all the rules. Instead, He says to us -- "There is absolutely nothing you can do to obtain my grace... nothing." And He also says that all those good works we're doing, trying to rack up enough "Brownie points" for God to allow us into heaven, are but "filthy rags" to Him. (Isaiah 64:6 NIV)

And we say, "But surely there is something, something I can do. If I serve more in church... if I give more than my tithe... if I teach Sunday School... if I witness more... if I don't drink or smoke... if I follow all the rules..." We are constantly trying to EARN favor with God. But we can't earn it. And we can't UN-earn it. There is nothing that we can do - right, wrong, or indifferent - that will influence God to give us more or less of His grace. So, He says to us, "Just bow down to me, and be grateful."

Like the Galatians, so many of us are quick to turn away from God's grace and toward a lifestyle that is dependent upon our own merits rather than what God can do and has done for us through Jesus. It's so very hard to comprehend that He would love us just because He loves us. No, we must have to do something to earn His love. We must have to do something to get to heaven on our own. We must have to do something to obtain His favor. And if we don't do right, we'll lose His love. Our salvation will go down the tubes if we don't follow the rules. God only takes care of us if we're doing everything according to the rules. Right? Wrong!

Why are we, like the Galatians, so quick to abandon grace? Again, it is because you and I are so very unwilling to depend on anyone else - including God - for our well-being. So, instead of freedom, we choose slavery. Instead of peace, we choose worry and fear. Instead of God's grace, we choose to depend on ourselves, and thereby thumb our noses at Jesus' sacrifice for us on the cross.

But what about the Ten Commandments? Surely they are still in effect, even if the other 600+ laws were nailed to the cross. The answer is, no, not when it comes to what "supervises" us. And it's a good thing! The truth is, there is not one person who can manage to observe the Ten Commandments wholly and completely. In fact, most people can't get past the FIRST Commandment, much less fully comply with the other nine. The First Commandment is, "You shall have no other gods before me." No person has ever gone through his or her life without allowing something or someone to come between that person and God. And if something or someone comes between you and God in any way, you have broken the first Commandment. James 2:10 (NIV) says, "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it." Whew! That's rough, isn't it? But that is the absolute truth. So, were the Ten Commandments nailed to the cross along with the rest of the Law? And even so, aren't we required to follow them as Christians? The truth is, the whole Law of Moses has been rendered inoperative by the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus.

This is evident in three ways. First, from Romans 10:4, "Christ is the end of the law, so there may be righteousness for everyone who believes." Jesus is the complete end and fulfillment of the law's 613 commandments, ending their jurisdiction over us completely. We are no longer justified by law keeping of any kind.

Galatians 2:16, "... know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified." And in Hebrews 7:18-19, "The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God." God's rending of the veil in the temple at the moment of Jesus' death was a powerful demonstration that the Old Testament covenant had been done away with, and that God was beginning a new and superior covenant with His church. Matthew 27:51 says, "At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split." God showed in a wonderful way that the way to Him was opened (Hebrews 10:14-16). No longer is there a need for priesthods, altars, temples, rites or sacrifices. Jesus has finished, once for all, the works of salvation by His death on the cross. (Hebrews 7:27, 10:10; Romans 6:10).

This earthquake is parallel with the earthquake at Mt. Sinai when God gave Moses the Law. (Exodus 19:16) The earthquake at Calvary signified that the demands of the law were over and curse of the law forever abolished. (Hebrews 12:18-24) The torn veil indicates He conquered sin; the earthquake that he conquered the law and fulfilled it. A careful study of the Scriptures will show that the law was never intended to be a permanent administration, but rather a temporary one. Galatians 3:19 states, "What, then, was the purpose of the law? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred (Jesus) had come." Here, Paul is showing that the Law of Moses is an addition to God's covenant with Abraham. It was added for the express purpose of revealing the holiness of God and the sinful nature of man, in order to make men know just how sinful they really were. Paul said in Romans 7:7, "Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law."

So the law was meant to be a temporary measure until the Christ came. Now that He has come, the law is no longer in effect. Take a look at Romans 3:20-21, "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 the law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify." Every bit of the law was nailed to that bloody cross at

Calvary, having been completed and filled in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ. Colossians 2:14-16 says, "...having cancelled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration, or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ." The "written code" was the Decalogue, written by the finger of God himself, representing the whole law. This handwriting opposed us in that it only amplified every man's guilt and unworthiness before God. Jesus blotted out this handwriting by His triumph at

Calvary. He rendered it null and void. The Greek term used by Paul in verse 14 is "exaleipho" - "to totally wipe and wash away" or "to wipe off, wipe away, to obliterate." God used such a strong word to emphasize in unmistakable language the fact of the law's obliteration for the Christian. Since Christians have been freed forever from the whole law (all 613 of them), we must resist any temptation to become legalistic and thereby to become ensnared into new bondage to legalistic requirements. Believe me, I spent enough time under the law when I was trying to "earn" my way to heaven, and now I am totally and eternally grateful to Jesus for freeing me of that bondage. Although I could never do enough to "pay Him back" for the gift He's given me, I will spend every day of this life serving Him as best I can, in my own meager way of showing Him my gratitude.

What God has shown me through His word - and through a lot of tough learning experiences - Paul addressed again and again in his letters, hitting the subject particularly hard in Romans and Galatians. Over and over again, the New Testament scriptures teach us about the freedom of God's grace versus the bondage of the Law. In Galatians 3:23-25 he said, "Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law." Any time that we try to enforce "rules and regulations", God's grace goes right out the window

in favor of bondage. Paul summed it up the best in Galatians 2:21, "I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing." Is God's grace a license to sin? NO! As Paul said in Romans 6:15-18 (NIV), "What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey - whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness."

So what about the person who claims to be a Christian, but not one evidence of it shows in his life? This is something that confuses a lot of people, especially in light of James 2:14, 17 (NIV), "What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?....In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead." But if you look at those verses in James, and then read 1 John 1:5-10, the picture of how faith and works go together becomes much clearer. 1 John 1:5-10 (NIV) says, "This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives." (Emphasis mine) So, in other words, if a person claims to be saved, and yet there is no evidence of it in his life, then that person is a liar, plain and simple. And if a person says that he is or can be without sin, then he is making Jesus out to be a liar.

So that's God's grace. It is not only un-earned, it is undeserved. Because not one of us is capable of earning the right to stand before God - not one. And no matter how hard we might try, every good thing we do is nothing but those "filthy rags" in the eyes of God (Isaiah 64:6 NIV). Perhaps Paul said it best in Ephesians 2:8 (NIV), "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."

If you've been depending on yourself to get there, stop. Let go. Relax. Accept the free gift of grace God has given you. Accept the freedom that you can have through Jesus Christ. Don't abandon God's grace. Accept it, and be free!

"I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing." Galatians 2:21 (NIV)