

Sermon Notes/Follow-up

8-22-10

Knowing Who You Are: The Dynamics of Grace and Obedience

So much to say, so little time and space....take what I do here as a small fraction of the supplemental notes I'd really like to provide for the sermon.

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The church ought to be full of people who were once living wretched lives, lives of wickedness. The church is for sinners – no doubt about it. But the church is not for people who *persist* in their wickedness without fighting it. While Christians are obviously still sinners, the church is for those who want to fight against their sin in the strength Christ and his Spirit supply.

The secret to growing in obedience is knowing what we've been given in Christ. Grasp the grace that is yours in him! We are all desperate sinners, but God has provided just what we need – and everything we need – in Christ.

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In the kingdom, God resocializes us into a new way of life. As heirs of the kingdom, we are called to prefigure and proclaim the future kingdom in the present. We show there is a “new way of doing business,” a new way of being human, an alternative city and alternative culture. We show the world has a new king, and life lived under his lordship is “the way things really oughta be.”

The vices listed in 1 Cor. 6 that exclude one from the kingdom are disqualifying, not just because they are a matter of “breaking the rules” but because they are disruptions of God's design for human life. These vices pave the way to hell, not to the kingdom. They are anti-communal, anti-social, anti-human. They are self-centered rather than others-centered. They are the antithesis of kingdom life. To say those who live this way cannot inherit the kingdom is like saying those who hate dogs and even murder dogs will not be allowed to attend the dog show. Why would you even want to be in the kingdom, if your way of life is so diametrically opposed to the kingdom? You couldn't enjoy it anyway.

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Anthony Thiselton gives a good summary of the passage:

Paul is not describing the qualifications required for an entrance exam. He is comparing habituated actions which by definition can find no place in God's reign for the welfare of all with those qualities in accordance which Christian believers need to be transformed if they are to have any confidence they belong to God's new creation in Christ.

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Remember, the kingdom of God is not “heaven.” It is the world, remade and glorified by God. It is the new creation. It is already present, and still yet to come in its fullness. God does not intend to scrap this world; he’s going to transfigure it into perfect flourishing, so that we are in harmony with God, each other, and the rest of creation. This harmony is what the OT prophets called ‘shalom.’

An inheritance is a gift. It cannot be earned, though it can be lost. 1 Cor. 6:9-11 is not a moralistic or legalistic passage. Paul is not giving a moral entrance exam but describing the way life is lived in God’s kingdom. There are ways of life that so incongruent with the kingdom, that to persist in them can only be taken as a sign that this person has no true desire or interest in the kingdom. The vice list in 1 Cor. 6 shows ways in which shalom is destroyed and human relationships ripped apart. But kingdom life is a dominated by love and service; the ways of the kingdom weave us together into a new community, a new family.

How do you know if you’re a kingdom heir? The church is the core of the kingdom as it exists in the present. We know we are heirs if we see that God is preparing us for his new creation, particularly in the way we use sex, money, and power. We know we will inherit the kingdom if we are walking faithfully in and with a faithful covenant community.

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Two kinds of people can hear a text like 1 Cor. 6:9-11 and respond in very different ways. A true believer with a very tender conscience might feel discouraged, wondering, “Is my sin going to disqualify me from the kingdom? I struggle with many of these sins!” The answer, of course, is “No! If you’re struggling with sin that proves you’re on the right track.”

But then you have the person who really is living a double life who needs to be crushed by this kind of passage, but is going to try to brush it off.

How do you respond to this passage? Fear? Confidence? Something else? Why? What is the arc, or trajectory, of your life? Because we can so easily deceive ourselves, into thinking we are better (or worse!) off than we really are, it’s important to have honest friends who can ask you the hard questions and help you evaluate yourself. The Bible does not call on us to examine ourselves in a private, introspective way; rather, the best and most effective self-analysis comes in the context of the covenant community, where others can tell us what they see. It is certainly true that we can fool others, but we can never fool God. True, we can be hypocrites; but one element of hypocrisy is self-knowledge; the hypocrite knows he’s living a double life and makes a conscious effort to hide his sinful secrets. The honest believer will struggle

with sin and will not always *feel* very holy. But the very fact that he cares, that he struggles, that he fights, that he asks himself hard questions, is a sign he's on the right track, a track leading to kingdom inheritance.

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The true believer is being changed. Like a caterpillar morphing into a butterfly, or carbon being pressed into a diamond, or an acorn growing into an oak tree, the faithful Christian is being transfigured from one degree of glory to an even greater and higher glory.

When God tells us we must obey, he is not commanding us to make bricks without straw. He's given us the resources and means we need to change. Sin no longer has dominion over us (Rom. 6). If we trust God continually, we can defeat sin and move to greater maturity. Paul seems to have been far more optimistic about Christian transformation than many Christians today. Why have we lost his robust confidence in the gospel?

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There really shouldn't be any question about the baptismal reference in 1 Cor. 6:11. All the verbs (washed, sanctified, justified) are in the aorist tense, pointing to a definitive past action. Baptism in the book of Acts is a washing in the name of Jesus and throughout the NT, baptism is associated with justification (Acts 2:38; 22:16), sanctification (=becoming a priest; Heb. 10:19ff; Gal. 3:27), union with Christ (Rom. 6), and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38; Tit. 3:5; Jn. 3:5).

In the rest of the chapter, Paul unfolds the meaning of baptism as a sanctifying washing, which consecrates us as priests and temples. Other OT connections in the background point the same direction. For example, if governmental/disciplinary practices in Ex. 18 and Deut. 1 are behind the teaching of 1 Cor. 6:1ff, as they almost certainly are, we should note that Israel's preparations for meeting God at Sinai (Ex. 19) include a sanctifying washing.

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It is important that when Scripture calls us to obey God, it has not left off talking about grace. Grace underlies and empowers all true obedience, so talking about obedience does not mean we have changed the subject from the gospel to something else. Unfortunately, many presentations of the gospel reduce the message to justification; they so stress what God does outside of us, that anything else (namely, anything, subjective or transformational) seems tacked on as a kind of afterthought.

The reality is this: *All that I am called to do for God is rooted in all that God has done for me.* Or to put it another way: *What the Spirit does in me is just as much 'gospel' as*

*what Christ did outside me. Transformation by grace is just as integral to the gospel as justification by grace.*

If we keep that in mind, we'll be able to understand how the biblical conditions and demands for obedience fit into the gospel. Everything flows out of union with Christ. Our forgiveness is found in him and our transformation comes from him. God didn't just accomplish something for us at the cross in the past, to which we respond; God also continues to work in and through us, to change us and further his kingdom, right this very minute. To state it again: All our obedience to God is founded upon all God in Christ has done – and is doing -- for us. It is God's great love for us that frees us to show great love towards him and others. It is God's work on our behalf that enables us to work for him. It is God's work for us and in us that makes us his forgiven and obedient people.

Seen in this light the demand for obedience, while no less radical, becomes less of a threat and more of a promise. As Augustine said, "Lord, command what you will, and give what you command." Sure, we still have to make an effort; we are called on to strive, to work, to fight, to take up our cross, to build, to sacrifice. To say God works these things in us does not necessarily make them any easier, and there will never be any such thing as pain free Christian life. But we should also remember that behind all our exertions lie the exertions of the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead. Now, that's true power!

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C. S. Lewis on three kinds of men:

There are three kinds of people in the world.

The first class is of those who live simply for their own sake and pleasure, regarding Man and Nature as so much raw material to be cut up into whatever shape may serve them.

In the second class are those who acknowledge some other claim upon them—the will of God, the categorical imperative, or the good of society—and honestly try to pursue their own interests no further than this claim will allow. They try to surrender to the higher claim as much as it demands, like men paying a tax, but hope, like other taxpayers, that what is left over will be enough for them to live on. Their life is divided, like a soldier's or a schoolboy's life, into time "on parade" and "off parade," "in school" and "out of school."

But the third class is of those who can say like St Paul that for them "to live is Christ." These people have got rid of the tiresome business of adjusting the rival claims of Self and God by the simple expedient of rejecting the claims of Self altogether. The old egoistic will has been turned round, reconditioned, and made into a new thing. The will of Christ no longer limits theirs; it is theirs. All their time, in belonging to Him, belongs also to them, for they are His.

And because there are three classes, any merely twofold division of the world into good and bad is disastrous. It overlooks the fact that the members of the second class (to which most of us belong) are always and necessarily unhappy. The tax which moral conscience levies on our desires does not in fact leave us enough to live on. As long as we are in this class we must either feel guilt because we have not paid the tax or penury because we have. The Christian doctrine that there is no "salvation" by works done to the moral law is a fact of daily experience. Back or on we must go. But there is no going on simply by our own efforts. If the new Self, the new Will, does not come at His own good pleasure to be born in us, we cannot produce Him synthetically. The price of Christ is something, in a way, much easier than moral effort—it is to want Him. It is true that the wanting itself would be beyond our power but for one fact. The world is so built that, to help us desert our own satisfactions, they desert us. War and trouble and finally old age take from us one by one all those things that the natural Self hoped for at its setting out. Begging is our only wisdom, and want in the end makes it easier for us to be beggars. Even on those terms the Mercy will receive us.

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Dallas Willard:

The word "disciple" occurs 269 times in the New Testament. "Christian" is found three times and was first introduced to refer precisely to disciples of Jesus – in a situation where it was no longer possible to regard them as a sect of the Jews (Acts 11:26). The New Testament is a book about disciples, by disciples, and for disciples of Jesus Christ.... For at least several decades the churches of the Western world have not made discipleship a condition of being a Christian. One is not required to be, or to intend to be, a disciple in order to become Christian, and one may remain a Christian without any signs of progress toward or in discipleship. Contemporary American churches in particular do not require following Christ in his example, spirit, and teachings as a condition of membership – either of entering into or continuing in fellowship of a denomination or local church. I would be glad to learn of any exception to this claim, but it would only serve to highlight its general validity and make the general rule more glaring. So far as the visible Christian institutions of our day are concerned, *discipleship clearly is optional*.

Sadly, Willard is on target. Christian faith in America has become mostly a religion of conversion, not discipleship. The roots of this problem are very old, of course, because God's grace has always been scandalous and has always been twisted into license. But in our own context, the problem largely traces back to the tent revivals of the Second Great Awakening, which stressed a one time "mountain top"

conversion experience, focused on numbers, and did not stress the demands of discipleship or the conditions of the covenant.

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Doug Moo:

God's gift of eternal life does not cancel the complementary truth that only by progressing in holiness will that eternal life be attained.

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From Martin Luther's letter to George Spalatin, on how Jesus is a real Savior for real sinners:

Get used to believing that Christ is a real Savior and that you are a real sinner. For God is neither joking nor is He dealing in imaginary affairs, but He was deadly serious when He sent His own Son into the world and sacrificed Him for our sake, etc. (Romans 8:32; John 3:16). Satan – who is alive and well – has snatched these and similar reflections, which come from soothing Bible passages, from your memory. Therefore, you are not able to recall them in your present great anguish and depression. For God's sake, then, turn your ears my way, brother, and hear me cheerfully sing. I am your brother. At this time I am not afflicted with the desperation and depression that is oppressing you. Therefore, I am strong in my faith. The reason I am strong in the faith – while you are weak and harried and harassed by the devil – is that you may lean on me for support until you regain your old strength.

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Tim Chester on the cross and change:

What's wrong with wanting to change so we can prove ourselves to God or people or ourselves? It doesn't work. We might fool other people for a while. We might even fool ourselves. But we can never change enough to impress God. And here's the reason: trying to impress God, others, or ourselves puts us at the center of our change project. It makes change all about my looking good. It is done for my glory. And that's pretty much the definition of sin. Sin is living for my glory instead of God's. Sin is living life my way, for me, instead of living life God's way, for God. Often that means rejecting God as Lord and wanting to be our own lord, but it can also involve rejecting God as Savior and wanting to be our own savior. Pharisees do good works and repent of bad works. But gospel repentance includes repenting of good

works done for wrong reasons. We need to repent of trying to be our own savior. Theologian John Gerstner says, "The thing that really separates us from God is not so much our sin, but our damnable good works."

Deep down in all of us there is a tendency to want to prove ourselves, to base our worth on what we do.

Here's the real problem with changing to impress: God has given his Son for us so that we can be justified. Jesus died on the cross, separated from his Father, bearing the full weight of God's wrath so that we can be accepted by God. When we try to prove ourselves by our good works, we're saying, in effect, that the cross wasn't enough.....

Jesus shows us God's agenda for change. God isn't interested in making us religious. Think of Jesus, who was hated by religious people. God isn't interested in making us spiritual if by spiritual we mean detached. Jesus was God getting involved with us. God isn't interested in making us self-absorbed: Jesus was self-giving personified. God isn't interested in serenity: Jesus was passionate for God, angry at sin, weeping for the city. The word *holy* means 'set apart' or 'consecrated.' For Jesus, holiness meant being set apart from, or different from, our sinful ways. It didn't mean being set apart *from* the world, but being consecrated *to* God in the world. He was God's glory *in* and *for* the world....

We become Christians by faith in Jesus, we stay Christians by faith in Jesus, and we grow as Christians by faith in Jesus...

You will cleanse no sin from your life that you have not first recognized as being pardoned through the cross. This is because holiness starts in the heart. The essence of holiness is not new behavior, activity, or disciplines. Holiness is new affections, new desires, and new motives that then lead to new behavior. If you don't see your sin as completely pardoned, then your affections, desires, and motives will be wrong. You will aim to prove yourself. Your focus will be the consequences of your sin rather than hating the sin and desiring God in its place....

When we go to the cross, we see our God dying for us. If you let any other god down, it will beat you up. If you live for people's approval or your career or possessions or control or anything else and you don't make it or you mess up, then you'll be left feeling afraid, downcast, or bitter. But when you let Christ down, he still loves you. He doesn't beat you up; he died for you.

Let his love win your love, and let that love replace all other affections. The secret of change is to renew your love for Christ as you see him crucified in your place....

The key to change is continually returning to the cross. A changing life is a cross-centered life. At the cross we see our source of sanctification (Ephesians 5:25-27; Colossians 1:22; Titus 2:14). We find hope, for we see the power of sin broken and the old nature put to death. We see ourselves united to Christ and bought by his blood. We see the glorious grace of God in Jesus Christ, dying for his enemies, the righteous for the unrighteous. We see our hope, our life, our resources, our joy. At the cross we find the grace, power, and delight in God we need to overcome sin. If we don't come to the cross again and again, we'll feel distant from God, disconnected from his power, and indifferent to his glory — and that is a recipe for sin....

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On the issue of obedience, I strongly, strongly recommend Alan P. Stanley's book *Salvation Is More Complicated Than You Think*. I also recommend: *Rediscovering Holiness* by J. I. Packer; *After You Believe* by N. T. Wright; *Faith Works* by John MacArthur; *Holiness* by J. C. Ryle; and *You Can Change* by Tim Chester. Writers such as Jerry Bridges, Sinclair Ferguson, and John Piper are also helpful, as all of them insist on gospel transformation.

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Augustine wrote, "For grace is given not because we have done good works, but in order that we may be able to do them." But of course, when we make use of the grace we've been given, more grace comes our way, so we grow in grace.

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Antinomianism and legalism have the same root, as both are forms of self-idolatry and self-justification. Keller:

People tend to think there are two ways to relate to God – to follow him and do his will or to reject him and do your own thing – but there are also two ways to reject God as Savior. One is the way already mentioned: by rejecting God's law and living as you see fit. The other, however, is by obeying God's Law, by being really righteous and really moral, so as to earn your own salvation. It is not enough to simply think there are two ways to relate to God. There are three: religion, irreligion, and the gospel. In 'religion,' people may look to God as their helper, teacher, and example, but their moral performance is serving as their savior. Both religious and irreligious people are avoiding God as Savior and Lord. Both are seeking to keep control of their own lives by looking to something besides God as their salvation. Religious legalism/moralism and secular/irreligious relativism are just different strategies of 'self-salvation.'

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Francis Schaeffer:

If we stress the love of God without the holiness of God, it turns out only to be compromise. But if we stress the holiness of God without the love of God, we practice something that is hard and lacks beauty. And it is important to show forth beauty before a lost world and a lost generation. All too often young people have not been wrong in saying that the church is ugly. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ we are called upon to show to a watching world and to our own young people that the church is something beautiful.

Several years ago I wrestled with the question of what was wrong with much of the church that stood for purity. I came to the conclusion that in the flesh we can stress purity without love or we can stress the love of God without purity, but that in the flesh we cannot stress both simultaneously. In order to exhibit both simultaneously, we must look moment by moment to the work of Christ, to the work of the Holy Spirit. Spirituality begins to have real meaning in our moment-by-moment lives as we begin to exhibit simultaneously the holiness of God and the love of God

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The issue in salvation is never how much obedience is necessary. Obedience is not something that can be quantified that way. Some people start very far from the goal of righteousness, so even after great progress, their lives might look more messy than a lot of unbelievers who are outwardly moral. These issues are complex, so we can never give formulaic answers.

What we can say is this: true knowledge of God will evidence itself in some way over time. A snapshot of a person's life might be misleading; what would a running video show? What's the bent, the trajectory, the overarching direction? We must think in terms of an ongoing relationship (even friendship) with God. It's not a matter of a one time profession of faith or conversion experience; it's not a matter of scoring 51% on a moral exam, so that your good works outweigh your bad works; it's not a matter of getting our doctrine all straightened out so that we have right ideas about God. Rather, it's a matter of relationship: striving to know and please God because we love him; spending time with him in public and private acts of worship; listening to his word and speaking back to him prayer; etc.

To ask, "How much progress must we make?" is to ask a question only God can answer in anyone's case. But we can say this: There does not seem to be any standing still in the Christian life. You cannot be spiritually static. We are always either moving towards greater growth and maturity, or drifting away to destruction. To live in accordance with the Spirit is to grow and mature in obedience (Rom. 8:5). This is out only option if we desire to inherit the kingdom (Gal. 5:19-21, 6:7-9).

The whole Christian life is lived by the grace of God. But God's grace is not opposed to good works; in fact, it produces good works, albeit, through our own effort and struggle (Phil. 2:12-13).

If obedience is required, how is assurance possible? Assurance is a function of faith, even as good works are the outflow of faith. We know that we are saved simply because we are trusting God. The Spirit bears witness to our faith that we are children with God. And, by faith, we can even discern ways in which God is helping us get the victory over sin.

To be sure, there is a paradox in Christian growth: the closer we grow to God, the holier we become, and yet we also come to see more and more of our sin (1 Tim. 1:5; Isa. 6:5; Lk. 5:8). So even as we are truly more holy, we feel less holy. How can good works factor into assurance? How can we get a good "read" on where we are and what kind of progress we're making? Well, for one thing, others can help us make a more objective assessment of ourselves. Also, God's Spirit can help us see through the sin he has exposed to the good work he is working in us. In this way, with Paul, we can strive to have a clear conscience. We can know our sins and forgiven and God is truly at work in us.

None of this amounts to a kind of perfectionism. Even our repentance is never all it should be. Saints are still sinners til the day they die. We see some of the greatest saints in history making some of the biggest blunders (e.g., Moses, David, Peter). But no saint is happy about his sin; he will confess it and repent of it, and seek to move forward. Lewis put it well: "A Christian is not a man who never goes wrong, but a man who is enabled to repent and pick himself up and begin over again after each stumble."

Of course, our ultimate hope is that God will complete his work of transformation at the last day (1 Jn. 3:2).

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On baptism in 1 Cor. 6:11, Richard Hays' commentary is particularly helpful (p. 97f, 99f).

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Since I've been quoting Lewis, maybe a quick anecdote would be helpful. Lewis did not grow up a believer, and was known for using some pretty rough language. One of his fellow high school students was shocked to learn years later that the great gospel apologist was the same foul-mouthed Jack Lewis he had know in their teen years. Lewis had been transformed by the grace of God!

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On obedience in the Westminster tradition:

<http://www.hornes.org/theologia/mark-horne/necessity-of-new-obedience>

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Herman Bavinck:

Christ is our holiness in the same sense in which he is our righteousness. He is a complete and all-sufficient Savior. He does not accomplish his work halfway but saves us really and completely. He does not rest until, after pronouncing his acquittal in our conscience, he has also imparted full holiness and glory to us.

By his righteousness, accordingly, he does not just restore us to the state of the just who will go scot-free in the judgment of God, in order then to leave us to ourselves to reform ourselves after God's image and to merit eternal life. But Christ has accomplished everything. He bore for us the guilt and punishment of sin, placed himself under the law to secure eternal life for us, and then arose from the grave to communicate himself to us in all his fullness for both our righteousness and sanctification (1 Cor. 1:30). The holiness that must completely become ours therefore fully awaits us in Christ.

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Thomas Schreiner on Rom. 8:1-17:

The Spirit's witness that we are God's children cannot be separated from obedience to the Father. Those who are children are also heirs, but this inheritance is also conditioned upon obedience, upon the willingness to suffer. The emphasis on conditions does not detract at all from the main theme of chapter 8, which is the assurance belonging to believers. The Spirit will overcome all obstacles and guarantees that believers meet all the necessary conditions, but for Paul this never means that the stating of conditions is unnecessary, for the Spirit does not work despite conditions but through them. The conditions are one means by which the promises are realized.

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B.B. Warfield on our ongoing need for the gospel:

There is nothing in us or done by us, at any stage of our earthly development, because of which we are acceptable to God. We must always be accepted for Christ's sake, or we cannot ever be accepted at all. This is not true of us only when we believe. *It is just as true after we have believed.* It will continue to be

trust as long as we live. Our need of Christ does not cease with our believing; nor does the nature of our relation to Him or to God through Him ever alter, no matter what our attainments in Christian graces or our achievements in behavior may be. It is always on His "blood and righteousness" alone that we can rest.

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Bernard of Clairvaux:

It dwells, but reigns not, abides, but neither rules nor prevails; in some measure it is rooted out, but not quite expelled: cast down, but not entirely cast out.

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John Stott:

We would surely pursue holiness with greater eagerness if we were convinced that it is the way of life and peace.

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Sinclair Ferguson:

Union with Christ in his death and resurrection ... is the foundation of sanctification in Reformed theology. It is rooted, not in humanity and their achievement of holiness or sanctification, but in what God has done in Christ, and for us in union with him. Rather than view Christians first and foremost in the microcosmic context of their own progress, the Reformed doctrine first of all sets them in the macrocosm of God's activity in redemptive history. It is seeing oneself in this context that enables the individual Christian to grow in true holiness....

This first thing to remember, of course, is that we must never separate the benefits (regeneration, justification, sanctification) from the Benefactor (Jesus Christ). The Christians who are most focused on their own spirituality may give the impression of being the most spiritual ... but from the New Testament's point of view, those who have almost forgotten about their own spirituality because their focus is so exclusively on their union with Jesus Christ and what He has accomplished are those who are growing and exhibiting fruitfulness. Historically speaking, whenever the piety of a particular group is focused on OUR spirituality that piety will eventually exhaust itself on its own resources. Only where our piety forgets about ourself and focuses on Jesus Christ will our piety be nourished by the ongoing

resources the Spirit brings to us from the source of all true piety, our Lord Jesus Christ.

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Some churches, especially those that promote a strict law/gospel dichotomy, often set Christians up for failure by having such low expectations for the Christian life. One woman relayed to me that her pastors told her, "You just cannot expect much growth this side of heaven. What we are now is pretty much what we'll be until we die." That might play well in the suburbs where the status quo is pretty comfortable. But what hope does this give a drug addict or alcoholic or homosexual? Are we communicating that such destructive life styles are beyond repair? Can we ever say, "such were some of you"?! Do we really expect God to be at work? Why are we skeptical of God working change in his people? Do we think our sin is stronger than God's grace?

Martyn Lloyd-Jones once said that unless we are accused of antinomianism, we have not really preached the gospel. True enough – though I like to add that Romans 6 is gospel too! Plus, I'd add that in an antinomian age, we haven't preached the gospel – including God's work of gracious transformation – unless someone accuses us of legalism! The preaching of Jesus can sound awfully legalistic to this who have a flat, one-dimensional gospel (justification only).

Quite frankly, there is more than one road to hell – antinomianism is just as dangerous as legalism. Against the legalist, we must consider the goodness of God. Against the antinomian, we must consider the severity of God. But the orthodox teaching is not just splitting the difference; it's something different altogether.

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Oliver O'Donovan:

Every way of life not lived by the Spirit of God is lived by 'the flesh', by man taking responsibility for himself whether in libertarian or legalistic ways, without the good news that God has taken responsibility for him.

Consequently we cannot admit the suggestion that Christian ethics should pick its way between the two poles of law and license in search of middle ground. Such an approach could end up by being only what it was from the start, an oscillation between two sub-Christian forms of life. A consistent Christianity must take a different path altogether, the path of an integrally evangelical ethics which rejoices the heart and gives light to the eyes because it springs from God's gift to mankind in Jesus Christ.

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On baptism in 1 Cor. 6, Peter Leithart has a number of helpful articles:

1. From <http://www.leithart.com/archives/001238.php>:

Does baptism justify? Justification is, of course, an act of *God*. But that puts the question differently without deflecting it: Does baptism declare a justification for the person baptized? Assuming the Augustinian (and Reformed) view that baptism is an act of God not of man, we may ask, is baptism the declaration of justification?

At least twice, Paul makes a direction connection between baptism and justification. Having reminded the Corinthians that they had been the kind of people who do not inherit the kingdom, he goes on to remind them that they are no longer such people: "but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of God" (6:11). Is Paul taking about water baptism when he refers to "washing" or to some spiritual and invisible washing? I believe the former; the phrase "in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ" echoes the baptismal formulae of Matthew 28 and Acts, and the reference to the Spirit also links with baptismal passages (Acts 2; 1 Cor 12:12-13). This whole passage is in fact embedded in a baptismal formula: "you were washed . . . in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ." Note too that Paul marks the shift from what the Corinthians "were" to what they "are" by a reference to their baptism. They have become different folk by being baptized. What, though, is the relationship between the baptism and sanctification and justification? The connection here is not absolutely clear, but I suggest that sanctification and justification are two implications of the event of baptism. The pagan Corinthians have been washed-sanctified-justified by their baptism into the name of Jesus and the concomitant action of the Spirit.

Romans 6:7 is another passage where Paul links baptism and justification. He who has died, Paul writes, is "justified from sin." And when, in context, does one die? "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life" (vv. 3-4). Baptism into Christ means baptism into death; those who have been baptized have been crucified with Jesus; and those who are dead in and with Jesus have been justified from sin. Here, "justify" carries the connotation of deliverance from the power of sin. Through baptism, we die to our natural solidarity and society with Adam and brought into solidarity with and the society of Jesus.

Romans 4 might also be brought into play here, though only indirectly. Paul says that Abraham was justified by faith prior to receiving circumcision, which was a "seal of the righteousness which he had while uncircumcised" (v. 11). Isaac, however, received the seal of righteousness as an infant, as did hundreds of generations of Jews. That is, their history is not identical to the history of the founding Abraham: They received a seal of righteousness

before they had any opportunity to express faith. They were marked out as the righteous on the 8th day. If we can transfer the description "seal of the righteousness of faith" to baptism, the same applied: Those who are baptized have received the seal, the tattoo and brand, of righteousness. They have been designated as the righteous by baptism.

Thus, Paul teaches that those who have been baptized have been justified. But how are we to understand this? And how does this fit with justification by grace through faith? The answer, I believe, turns on seeing baptism, as mentioned above, as an act of God. Baptism is analogous to the Word of God; it declares the forgiveness of sins and the justification of the ungodly. And both baptism and the gospel demand a response of faith. Faith in Romans 6 involves believing what baptism says about you: Those who are baptized into Christ Jesus are dead with him; therefore, "consider [reckon] yourselves to be dead to sin" (v. 11). This, of course, does not mean that I can go and live a life of unbelief and disobedience. Such a life would belie the declaration made in my baptism (which is of course Paul's whole point in Romans 6). Yet, baptism marks me as one who has "died to sin" through Christ and therefore one who has been "justified from sin."

This seems to me inherent in the Reformed defense of infant baptism. This defense often rests considerable weight on Peter's declaration that the "promise is to you and to your children," as well as on the pervasive biblical promise that God is a God to us and to our children. We talk about our children as "covenant children." That kind of argument, and that kind of language, are biblically sound. But surely that means that our children are objects of God's favor. And surely that means too that God considers our children to be among the righteous, for can God favor the unrighteous? It is possible, of course, for a baptized person to prove unrighteous in his conduct, but that, again, belies the status into which he entered by baptism.

There is a key difference between the Word declared in the gospel, and the declaration effected by baptism. The Word offers the favor of God generally; baptism declares that God favors *me* in particular. If baptism is not the public declaration of justification, where does that public declaration take place? Is it ever heard on earth, about me in particular? Is it heard anywhere but in my heart? As I have said before on this site, it appears to me that justification by faith and forensic justification are difficult to maintain apart from a strong view of baptismal efficacy, without saying that in baptism God Himself says something about me in particular. Newman argued (quite unfairly and inaccurately) that Luther delivered men from the tyranny of works but placed them under the tyranny of their feelings. If we say that justification is a legal declaration, but immediately say that this legal declaration is inaudible, then we are, it seems, very much in danger of falling under Newman's critique.

2. From <http://www.hornes.org/theologia/peter-leithart/baptism-and-the-church>:

In 27.2, the Westminster Confession says that because of the “spiritual relation” between sacraments and the things they represent, “the names and effects of the one are attributed to the other.” Applied to baptism, this means that when the Bible says that we are baptized into Christ (Rom. 6), it doesn’t necessarily mean that the rite of water baptism engrafts us to Christ but rather means that the “thing” that the sacrament signifies joins us to Christ. Peter doesn’t really mean that “baptism now saves you” (1 Pet. 3:21), but that the spiritual reality of baptism saves.

This idea seems perfectly natural, but a moment’s reflection shows how arbitrary the whole procedure is. No matter what the Bible says about baptism, you can always trot out the idea of “spiritual relation” to show that the Bible is speaking “sacramentally,” and doesn’t mean what it seems to say. But you can only do this if you know already—before actually looking at the Bible—what a rite like baptism can and cannot do. If we want to develop a *biblical* understanding of baptism, we need to begin with what the Scriptures say, no matter how unusual or unbelievable, rather than try to fit the biblical statements into some preconceived notions.

But how can we take the biblical statements seriously without attributing magical power to baptism? Our difficulties with the biblical claims for the sacraments arise from our individualistic modern focus. We wonder how “water applied to this person” can do what the Bible says it does, but we forget that “water applied to this person” is only a part of the total picture. We need to think in the context of the church, rather than merely in the context of individual salvation. Water is applied to this person by the church and to join him to the church.

With this in mind, let’s look at a particular text, 1 Corinthians 6:11. Paul is contrasting the condition of the Corinthians before their conversion to Christ and their new life afterward. Some were dissolute and wicked, but now they are “washed, sanctified, and justified” in Christ and the Spirit. I take the “washing” to be a reference to baptism, and the wording suggests that sanctification and justification are conferred through the washing. I believe this because the phrase “in the name of Jesus” occurs at the end of the series of verbs, though we would expect it to be directly connected with the “washing.” Thus, it is best to read this as, “you received a sanctifying and justifying washing in the name of Jesus and in the Holy Spirit.”

How can Paul attribute justification and sanctification to baptism when he everywhere attributes justification to “faith, without the works of the Law”? We can go a ways to answering this question by taking more seriously the biblical claim that the church is the “body of Christ.” Because this is true, being joined to the church also means being joined to Christ. Christ is the holy one, and His Body is the holy people, the “saints” (“holy ones”) claimed as God’s peculiar possession. By His resurrection, the Father vindicated or justified the Son (Rom. 4:25), and by union with the body of the Justified Christ, we are justified (i.e., counted as covenant-keepers).

None of this means that baptism guarantees eternal salvation. One consecrated as a saint may renounce God’s claim on him; one can be cut off

from the people whom the Lord regards as covenant-keepers, and entire churches may be snuffed out, cut from the vine. But those who live out of their baptism, faithful to the Lord in His Body, may be assured they are sanctified and justified.

3. From <http://www.biblicalhorizons.com/biblical-horizons/no-85-baptism-and-the-spirit/>:

Pneumatology, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, is often formulated along dispensational lines. The Holy Spirit's work in the Old Testament, we tend to think, was earthly, concerned with political and military leadership, while in the New Testament the Spirit's work has to do with mediating salvation achieved by Christ. The Spirit's work in the Old Testament was functional, official, and earthly; His work in the New is spiritual, soteriological, and heavenly. I am far from denying that there are discontinuities in the Spirit's work; clearly, before Christ died and rose again, the Spirit could not have communicated to us the power of His resurrection or given us a share in the New Creation. Indeed the Spirit's presence and work is so dramatically enhanced by the "glorification" of the Son in His death and resurrection that John can comment that the Spirit "was not yet because Jesus was not yet glorified" (Jn. 7:39). Still, it is a basic error to introduce too sharp an historical discontinuity in the work of the Spirit. A covenantal approach insists, on the contrary, that the pattern of His working in the Old Covenant provides the framework for understanding His working now.

In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit "came" upon individuals to equip them for particular tasks, for ministry within Israel. The Spirit on Moses was distributed to seventy of the elders of Israel so they could share in the burden of leading the people (Num. 11:16-17). Yahweh's Spirit was on Othniel when he served as a judge (Jud. 3:10), on Gideon to resist the invasion of Midianites, Amalekites, and the sons of the East (Jud. 6:34), and on Jephthah when he fought the Ammonites (Jud. 11:29). At the Spirit's incitement, Samson burned against and defeated the Philistines (Jud. 13:25; 14:19; 15:14). The Spirit came on Saul when he met a group of prophets and later when he heard about the Ammonite attack on Jabesh-Gilead. In the latter case, he moved in the power of the Spirit to deliver the city (1 Sam. 10:10; 11:6). When David was anointed as king-designate by Samuel, the Spirit came on him mightily (1 Sam. 16:13), and it was in the power of the Spirit that David defeated Goliath, sparking a great Israelite victory, and later rose to the throne of Israel. In these and other cases in the Old Testament, the Spirit's work is to equip the leaders of God's people for service to the community of God's people.

In the New Covenant, there is certainly a "democratization" of the Spirit's ministry. Pentecost announces the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy that the Spirit would be poured out upon "all flesh." Through the Spirit, all believers have been made not only prophets, but priests and kings in Christ. Though the gifts of the Spirit are distributed more widely, they are not different in

kind and purpose from what they were under the Old Testament. It is still the Spirit's work to equip men and women for service in Israel. By the Spirit we are incorporated into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13), and equipped for ministry to the body (1 Cor. 12:4-7). As Orthodox theologian John Zizioulas has pointed out, the body of Christ as described in 1 Corinthians 12 consists of the various ministries and ministers of the church. It is not that there is an organization or community called the church, to which certain functions and gifts are later added; the community is constituted by the variously gifted ministers equipped by the same Spirit to serve the common good. It is not that we possess the Spirit who gives life, and then the Spirit later adds gifts for service; there is no such thing as membership in the church that is not also ministry to the church.

Membership in the body of Christ by the Spirit does not merely mean that we have a status or position but also that we have a vocation to service. We are not prophets, priests, and kings for ourselves but for one another. As prophets, we have access to the Lord's council to offer intercession and to receive the word that can edify others; as priests, we are called to guard and maintain the house of God; as kings, we are equipped for battle and called to self-sacrificing service. Even the fruits of the Spirit are not merely moral virtues that we possess for ourselves – whatever could that mean in any case? – but are the virtues required for peaceful, righteous, and truthful living in the new human race that is the church. The Spirit mediates salvation to us, but being saved is inseparable from a life of ministry. It is not that we are saved and then at some second stage begin to serve. Service in the power of the Spirit is the very form of life in Christ (Phil. 2:5-11).

Taking the Old Testament pattern as our guide, we should understand too that the Spirit is not a guaranteed endowment, if that is taken to mean that we cannot lose the Spirit no matter how we live. If we assume that there is a sharp difference between the Spirit's work in the Old Covenant and His work in the New, then the Spirit's departure from Saul in the Old Testament presents no problem. If Saul was clothed in the Spirit "only" in an "official" capacity, then the Spirit's desertion of him does not have implications for the Spirit's work under the New Covenant. Saul had the Spirit temporarily and conditionally; we have the Spirit permanently and unconditionally. In fact, 1 Samuel makes it clear that the gift of the Spirit affected Saul's heart; the Spirit was not "only" given for official business. As Saul left Samuel following his anointing, "God changed his heart" (10:9); Saul hated and fought against the Lord's enemies (11:6-11); and Saul dealt mercifully with those who had opposed his coronation (11:12-13). Saul did not persevere, refusing to listen to the voice of the Lord's prophet and eventually dining at the table of demons in the house of the witch of Endor. From the evidence of Scripture we are led to surmise that Saul was not eternally elect, but that is not our business. The fact that he did not persevere does not cancel the witness of Scripture that the Spirit's coming on him "changed his heart." With Saul, the Spirit's work was oriented both to "personal transformation" and to "ministry," and indeed the two were inseparable. Again, the Spirit's work in

the New Testament is on the same model. The Spirit both gives us new hearts and equips us for ministry, but if we, like Saul, grieve the Spirit with our impenitence and ingratitude, He will leave us (1 Sam. 16:14; cf. Eph. 4:30). In 1 Samuel, there is a parallel between the Spirit's presence in the tabernacle and His presence in the king. In chapters 1-4, we have an account of the perversity of the priests and the consequent capture of the ark, a story summarized by Phinehas's wife as a story of "Ichabod," the departure of the glory-Spirit from Israel. In chapters 10-15, we have the same story at an individual level: The Spirit comes to dwell with Saul but Saul's sins drive the Spirit out and Saul too becomes Ichabod, slain on the slopes of Gilboa. The parallel between the glory's presence among the people in His house and the Spirit's presence with the individual, Saul, works out the symbolism of the tabernacle. Since the Lord's house is an architectural image of the person, the pattern of the Spirit's presence in the tabernacle and temple manifests the pattern of His presence in and with persons. As the Spirit departed from Saul, so the Spirit departed from His dwelling place among the people, leaving the house desolate.

The fact that the Spirit can and will depart from impenitent individuals and communities does not undermine the promise of the Spirit's perpetual presence with the church. It remains true, as Irenaeus said, that "where the church is, there is the Spirit." In 1 Samuel, the glory's departure is not the end of the story: The Lord fights for Israel while the ark is in exile, and the ark is eventually returned and the glory enthroned in Jerusalem. At the individual level, the Spirit leaves Saul to dwell in one after God's own heart. Similarly, in Ezekiel 11:22-25 the cloud abandons the defiled temple, but it moves east – to accompany the faithful remnant into exile. So too in the New Testament, the Spirit will abandon faithless individuals and unbelieving churches, and will go outside the gates, into the catacombs, to dwell with the rag-tag remnant of those who cleave to Him in humility and faith. The pattern is the same in both Testaments; the Spirit's presence with the true Israel was as permanent and abiding in the Old Testament as in the New. The threat of the Spirit's departure from the impenitent is just as real today as it was for Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

One benefit of seeing the Holy Spirit's work in the New Covenant in the light of the Old Testament is the aid it gives us in understanding the relation of the Spirit and baptism. Baptism is associated consistently with the gift of the Spirit, but Reformed theology has hesitated to make an identification of the baptized with the Spirit-endowed. Primarily, this is done to protect the sovereignty of the Spirit who bloweth where He listeth. But does the Spirit want or need this kind of protection? To say that the Spirit is present and works apart from the instituted sacraments is different from saying that the Spirit is not always present and active in the instituted sacraments. The first is an affirmation of God's sovereign freedom; the second seems a hypernominalist claim that God is free to violate His own promises. Is it a manifestation of God's freedom for Him not to be where He promises to be? I hardly think so.

If the Spirit has promised that He will be present and active at the water of baptism, then we can be certain that He, the Spirit of truth, will be there. And there is indeed a promise of the Spirit's presence with the water: Peter promised on Pentecost that those who were baptized would receive the Spirit (Acts 2:38); Paul says that we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body (1 Cor. 12:13); by God's grace He saved us by the "washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit" (Tit. 3:5). As G. R. Beasley-Murray puts it, for the New Testament "baptism is the supreme moment of the impartation of the Spirit and of the work of the Spirit in the believer" (*Baptism in the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962], p. 275). All this makes good sense in the light of the Old Testament pattern. We can affirm that the Spirit is active and present in baptism, that the Spirit comes to dwell in the baptized, without falling into the error of claiming that all who are baptized are eternally saved and secure regardless of their lack of faithfulness. The Spirit comes to dwell in us at baptism but the Spirit's continuing presence in and with us is conditional, as it was with Saul, on our response of faithfulness (which is, in turn, dependent on the Spirit's gift of persevering faith). In 1 Corinthians 6, Paul alludes to the temple/tabernacle model developed above and connects it with baptism. We are called to keep our bodies holy, undefiled by harlotry and fornication, because our bodies are "members of Christ" (6:15) and "a temple of the Holy Spirit" (6:19). When did we become "members of Christ" and "temples of the Holy Spirit"? According to 6:11, the transition from being unrighteous to being members of Christ is the moment when we were "washed, sanctified, and justified," the first of these evidently being a reference to baptism. Baptism is our consecration as temples, dwelling places of the glory-Spirit. (This characterization of baptism is hardly new: Gregory the Great insisted that every baptized Christian was a priest with the daily duty of stoking up the fire on the altar of his heart, and Pope Innocent III, among others, explicitly linked baptism to the dedication of the temple.) Thus, the Spirit comes to dwell in our bodily temple when we are baptized, but the temple of our body can become defiled – particularly, in 1 Corinthians 6:18, with fornication – and the Spirit, Ezekiel 9-11 makes clear, will not continue to dwell in a defiled house.

As in the Old Covenant, then, the endowment with the Spirit at baptism does not guarantee His permanent presence. We can grieve the Spirit. The Spirit can depart from us. It is possible to commit blasphemy against the Spirit, and remain unforgiven. It is only as we walk humbly, penitently, confessing and renouncing our sins, that the Spirit will remain with us.

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Legalism and antinomianism actually feed off each other, and can even be found in the same person at the same time. We see this, e.g, with the Pharisees in the gospels and we have probably seen it in our own lives. I didn't deal with this in the sermon, but is an important point. We may find ourselves being legalistic on some issues and

libertine on others. Of course, the problem is that both legalism and libertinism still miss what the gospel is all about, since it includes both free forgiveness and total transformation.

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From this sermon, <http://www.christthetruth.org.uk/1Cor6.mp3>, there is a helpful little anecdote about how security begets obedience:

[Here is a very interesting anecdote from a Dawn French biography] that illustrates this point beautifully:

The context is, Dawn French is 14 years old and she's just about to go out to her first ever disco when her father sits her down for a chat. Dawn writes "I was ready to get into a huff because I thought I was going to hear the usual litany about not drinking too much and what time I had to be in, and not getting too involved with boys, but instead I was the recipient of the most extraordinary emotional eulogy.

"He told me that I was uncommonly beautiful, that I was the most precious thing in his life, that he prized me above all else [and] that he was proud to be my father... He went into this great overture of praise for me... He succeeded in making me so proud of myself, and making my self-esteem so high, that I wasn't going to let any boy kiss me at all that night – I was just too good."

Do you see how that works? The embrace of her father, meant more to her than the embrace of any pimply 14 year old. She kept her sexual integrity because she knew just how special she was to her father.

The biographer comments: "Dawn was secure in the knowledge that she was loved for who she was, not what she looked like. She believed her father when he told her that she was something special, and that knowledge gave her an inner confidence that made her positively shine. [Dawn writes] "It was my father who taught me to value myself... How wise of my father to say those words to me. It affected my whole life. How could you not come out of it well equipped to deal with life, when you felt so loved and supported."

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Paul Tripp on grace – this would be a good post to discuss ([http://www.desiringgod.org/Blog/2598\\_grace\\_right\\_here\\_right\\_now/](http://www.desiringgod.org/Blog/2598_grace_right_here_right_now/)):

Do you understand the majesty and practicality of the grace you have been given? If you don't, in subtle and not so subtle ways, you are looking to other things to get you through. You don't need to go out searching for hope and help, because they are already yours in the resources of grace that you have been given as God's child.

*Grace* is the most transformational word in the Bible. The entire content of the Bible is a narrative of God's grace, a story of undeserved redemption. By the transformational power of his grace, God unilaterally reaches his hands into the muck of this fallen world, through the presence of his Son, and radically transforms his children from what we are (sinners) into what we are becoming by his power (Christ-like). The famous Newton hymn uses the best word possible, maybe the only word big enough, for that grace—*amazing*.

So grace is a story and grace is a gift. It is God's character and it is your only hope. Grace is a transforming tool and a state of relationship. Grace is a beautiful theology and a wonderful invitation. Grace is a life-long experience and a life-changing calling. Grace will turn your life upside down while giving you a rest you have never known. Grace will require you to face your unworthiness without ever making you feel unloved.

Grace will make you finally acknowledge that you cannot earn God's favor, and it will once and for all remove your fear of not measuring up to his standards. Grace will humble you with the fact that you are much less than you thought you were, even as it assures you that you can be far more than you had ever imagined. You can be sure that grace will put you in your place without ever putting you down.

Grace will enable you to face shocking truths about yourself that you have hesitated to consider, while freeing you from being self-consciously introspective. Grace will confront you with profound weaknesses, and at the same time bless you with new-found strength. Grace will tell you again and again what you aren't, while welcoming you again and again to what you can now be. Grace will make you as uncomfortable as you have ever been, while offering you a more lasting comfort than you have never before known. Grace will work to drive you to the end of yourself, while it invites you to fresh starts and new beginnings. Grace will dash your ill-founded hopes, but never walk away and leave you hopeless. Grace will decimate your little kingdom of one as it introduces you to a much, much better King. Grace will expose to you the extent of your blindness as it gives you eyes to see what you so desperately need to see. Grace will make you sadder than you have ever been, while it gives you greater cause for celebration than you have ever known.

Grace enters your life in a moment and will occupy you for eternity. *You simply cannot live a productive life in this broken-down world unless you have a practical grasp of the grace you have been given.*

Are you living out of this *amazing* grace? Does it shape the way you respond to your personal struggles, your relationships, and your work? Does your trust in this grace form how you live with your husband or wife? Does it

propel the way you parent your children? Does it give you comfort when friends have disappointed you? Does it give you rest when life is unpredictable and hard? Does it make you bold and give you courage in places where you would have once been timid? Does it make the idols that tempt you less attractive and less powerful? Do you wake up and say, "I don't know what I will face today, but this I do know: I have been given amazing grace to face it right here, right now." May God help you to understand and rest in the grace that you have been given!

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Jonathan Edwards, quotations on the conditions of justification – not exactly the topic of the sermon, but certainly relevant in stressing that obedience is an essential condition of salvation:

Here, if I may humbly express what seems evident to me, though faith be indeed the condition of justification so as nothing else is, yet this matter is not clearly and sufficiently explained by saying that faith is the condition of justification, and that because the word seems ambiguous, both in common use, and also as used in divinity. In one sense, Christ alone performs the condition of our justification and salvation. In another sense, faith is the condition of justification, and in another sense, other qualifications and acts are conditions of salvation and justification too. There seems to be a great deal of ambiguity in such expressions as are commonly used (which yet we are forced to use), such as condition of salvation, what is required in order to salvation or justification, the terms of the covenant, and the like, and I believe they are understood in very different senses by different persons. And besides, as the word condition is very often understood in the common use of language, faith is not the only thing in us that is the condition of justification. For by the word condition, as it is very often (and perhaps most commonly) used, we mean anything that may have the place of a condition in a conditional proposition, and as such is truly connected with the consequent, especially if the proposition holds both in the affirmative and negative, as the condition is either affirmed or denied. If it be that with which, or which being supposed, a thing shall be, and without which, or it being denied, a thing shall not be, we in such a case call it a condition of that thing. But in this sense faith is not the only condition of salvation and justification. For there are many things that accompany and flow from faith, with which justification shall be, and without which, it will not be, and therefore are found to be put in Scripture in conditional propositions with justification and salvation, in multitudes of places. Such are love to God, and love to our brethren, forgiving men their trespasses, and many other good qualifications and acts. And there are many other things besides faith, which are directly proposed to us, to be pursued or performed by us, in order to eternal life, which if they are done, or obtained, we shall have eternal life, and

if not done, or not obtained, we shall surely perish. And if faith was the only condition of justification in this sense, I do not apprehend that to say faith was the condition of justification, would express the sense of that phrase of Scripture, of being justified by faith. There is a difference between being justified by a thing, and that thing universally, necessarily, and inseparably attending justification: for so do a great many things that we are not said to be justified by. It is not the inseparable connection with justification that the Holy Ghost would signify (or that is naturally signified) by such a phrase, but some particular influence that faith has in the affair, or some certain dependence that effect has on its influence...

But the determining what concerns acts of Christian obedience can have in justification in this respect, will depend on the resolving of another point, viz. whether any other act of faith besides the first act, has any concern in our justification, or how far perseverance in faith, or the continued and renewed acts of faith, have influence in this affair. And it seems manifest that justification is by the first act of faith, in some respects, in a peculiar manner, because a sinner is actually and finally justified as soon as he has performed one act of faith, and faith in its first act does, virtually at least, depend on God for perseverance, and entitles to this among other benefits. But yet the perseverance of faith is not excluded in this affair. It is not only certainly connected with justification, but it is not to be excluded from that on which the justification of a sinner has a dependence, or that by which he is justified....

God in the act of justification, which is passed on a sinner's first believing, has respect to perseverance, as being virtually contained in that first act of faith, and it is looked upon, and taken by him that justifies, as being as it were a property in that faith. God has respect to the believer's continuance in faith, and he is justified by that, as though it already were, because by divine establishment it shall follow, and it being by divine constitution connected with that first faith, as much as if it were a property in it, it is then considered as such, and so justification is not suspended. But were it not for this, it would be needful that it should be suspended, till the sinner had actually persevered in faith....

And that it is so, that God in the act of final justification which he passes at the sinner's conversion, has respect to perseverance in faith, and future acts of faith, as being virtually implied in the first act...

But inasmuch as a sinner, in his first justification, is forever justified and freed from all obligation to eternal punishment, it hence of necessity follows, that future faith and repentance are beheld, in that justification, as virtually contained in that first faith and repentance....

And besides, if no other act of faith could be concerned in justification but the first act, it will then follow that Christians ought never to seek justification by any other act of faith. For if justification is not to be obtained by after acts of faith, then surely it is not a duty to seek it by such acts....

And thus it is that a truly Christian walk, and the acts of an evangelical, child-like, believing obedience, are concerned in the affair of our justification....

So that, as was before said of faith, so may it be said of a child-like believing obedience: it has no concern in justification by any virtue or excellency in it, but only as there is a reception of Christ in it....

It has been just now shown, how that acts of evangelical obedience are indeed concerned in our justification itself, and are not excluded from that condition that justification depends upon, without the least prejudice to that doctrine of justification by faith, without any goodness of our own, that has been maintained.

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Here's rough something I wrote a few years ago on baptism and the Christian life, in light of discussions about the "objectivity of the covenant" that were taking place back then:

First, on a biblical anthropology, the whole objective/subjective distinction deconstructs. It simply doesn't hold up because they are inseparable aspects of a whole. There is no detached objective status that can really be analyzed independently of someone's subjectivity. We're going to have to develop a new way to describe what we've meant by "objectivity of the covenant." There is nothing about me that is "purely objective." Get behind me Cartesian dualisms!

Second, we need to keep the "logic" of the covenant straight. It's not a matter of becoming "good enough" so God can finally accept us. If that was the case, we'd all be damned and the "objective" blessings of the covenant would've been a sham all along. Rather, it's a matter of *becoming* who and what we *already* are. It's a matter of receiving a gift.

To be sure you can throw the gift in the trash can, but why would you do that? And certainly the gift isn't kept by being "good enough"; after all, God's *already* given the gift to you *before* you were "good enough." It was free and always will be free. But free gifts can be abused, and thus we're warned against receiving the grace of God in vain (2 Cor. 6:1). Obedience is necessary not as a way of "paying God back" for the gift; it's necessary because it's *total* absence indicates the gift has been squandered.

The gift of baptism says, "This is who you are, as one who has been grafted into Christ." It's a gift of identity. We grow up into our baptismal identity by ever maturing faith.

Yes, we can forsake that identity, the way a married person can violate his marital identity; but if we do so, it won't be because we weren't "good enough." It will be because we willfully and deliberately rejected what God *freely* offered (and even gave) to us in the covenant. Don't fall back into a "guilty-until-I-prove-myself-innocent" mindset with the baptized. In the covenant it's the other way around. You don't have to be "good enough" to keep the blessings of the covenant, as though a set number of works had to be performed. That's how Allah works, but not the God of Jesus Christ.

Rather, we *keep* and *grow in* what we have by keeping our eyes fixed on Christ, the Author and Perfecter of our faith. Nothing else. Ironically, the truth is, we're only in danger of losing what we have in the covenant if we start to think that we have to be "good enough" to keep those blessings, because that's when we take our eyes off Christ and focus on ourselves.

Covenant keeping is like batting practice. It's simple. Keep your eyes on the ball = keep your eyes on Christ. No player hits the ball if he's constantly checking to see how clean his uniform is. Quit worrying about you look and just play the game! Don't get all introspective, just hit the ball!

Third, what is offered to us in baptism is not intended to burden us, as though it were "law" rather than "gospel." Rather, the promises made in baptism are liberating and assuring precisely because those promises are the "places" at which faith can get a foothold and begin to climb up towards maturity. What is offered in baptism does not crush the person with obligations; rather, it gives him something tangible and solid to get the hands and arms of faith around. When faith lays hold of the offers made in baptism, then faith begins to grow so that the other covenant "conditions" (for lack of a better term) are met.

But apart from the means of grace (properly understood), the Christian life looks like a sheer cliff. My baptism gives me something to hang onto, even if sometimes I feel like I'm having to dig my fingernails in. And yes, this is what Luther meant: when assailed with doubt, he'd cross his forehead, and remind himself of his baptism. Luther understood better than anyone that baptism gives faith a foothold. It keeps us from falling off the cliff into despair. It gives faith leverage, something to push off of so that we can keep climbing towards Christ-likeness with confidence.

Fourth, all this means that the "extraspective" nature of faith is integral to assurance. The efficacy of baptism that allows us to look outside ourselves

for salvation and assurance. Sacramental efficacy means the whole gospel is "outside of me," as Luther put it to Melancthon (who was extremely prone to introspection and fits of melancholy himself!). It means the gospel comes to us *extra nos*. If baptism doesn't actually *do* anything as a divine instrument, my faith will inevitably curve back in on itself for assurance. And that's how folks fall into the black hole of self-examination. It's no surprise that, historically, as views of sacramental efficacy declined, assurance became more and more a matter of inward evidences. This can be traced out from Calvin and Bucer to the later Puritans, but that's a task for another day.

To sum up, this baptismal theology means we should move from who we are to what we're supposed to be doing. Because of baptism I *am* a Christian -- which means being a Christian will never depend on how I feel about myself, or whether or not I've had the right kind of conversion experience, or what evidences of grace I can discern within myself, or whatnot. I just have to be what I already am. Baptism means I am free to live my whole life out of the gospel narrative because I know the gospel story is my story.

A couple more thoughts to round things out.

It's interesting to me that some think a high view of baptism will produce nominalism or antinomianism. When Paul actually confronts the challenge of antinomianism in Romans 6, how does he answer it? With baptism!! "You can't go on in sin -- you've been baptized!" And yet baptismal efficacy doesn't create a new legalism either, as though we had to be "good enough" to keep what we received in baptism. For Paul, to be baptized is to be [a] united to Christ in whom we have died to sin and been raised to new life; and [b] to be under grace rather than law. Baptism doesn't make us slaves; it's an exodus out of slavery! It sets us free from union to Adam and the predicament of the law. And yet for just that reason, it demands that we be loyal to one who has liberated us, our new husband. That's how the argument in Romans 6 seems to flow (in highly compressed form). Paul's theology of baptism cuts through both antinomianism and legalism like a knife through hot butter.

To say this is legalistic is like saying refraining from adultery creates a marriage bond. It's the other way around: you're married, and so now your obligation is to love your lover and not abandon the one you've pledged yourself to for another. But you can't "earn" a status you already have. You can only live out of it.

Or think of this way: baptism puts the same kind of obligation on us that resurrection puts on a dead person. If a dead person gets raised up, he *does* have a new obligation: to live! And that's just the point. Baptism calls us to live -- to live the life of the resurrection. Now surely "life"

of that sort is not burdensome, but a joy! Baptism frees us from all obligation, even as it obliges us to live a new kind of life.

In this way, baptism is precisely cruciform -- cf. Mk. 10:38-39. Baptism is the cross in sacramental form, just as the preached gospel translates the cross into verbal form. Baptism functions theologically in a way analogous to the cross because baptism applies the cross to us, making us sharers in Christ's death (Rom. 6). In NT theology, the cross is what *releases* me from all obligation because Jesus fulfilled all my obligations in his death, forgiving my sin. And yet the cross is also the *sum* of all my obligations as a new person. I must take the pattern of the cross up into my own life and follow the Crucified One (Lk. 9:23).

Just some ramblings, not polished, but hopefully helpful....

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On the transformation of America into a libertine society, from  
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A54736-2004Aug10?language=printer>:

In a span of about 15 years during the 1960s and 1970s, Americans underwent the kind of dramatic transformation of social values that usually occurs over generations, Yankelovich says. First college students, and then an overwhelming majority of Americans, rejected much of the social rigidity of the 1950s. Deeply held American values such as conformity, respectability, sacrifice and duty to others were elbowed aside by newer values: personal satisfaction, individual choice and a pluralism that tolerates vast differences in race, religion and lifestyle.

Yankelovich has coined the term "expressive individualism" to describe the new ethic of personal freedom that, among other things, opened the way for women, gays and minorities to make extraordinary gains. "It was a sweeping revolution, and we are still figuring out its consequences," Yankelovich says. One unintended consequence of the revolution, he says, is that social morality has now become so relative it has begun to make Americans on both the left and right very anxious, although they disagree sharply on what to do about that. Yankelovich sees that nervousness in Americans' responses to events as diverse as Enron's accounting fictions, the Roman Catholic Church's protection of pedophiles, the Iraqi prison abuse scandal and Jessica [Cutler's] blog.

"The country is taken aback by moral relativism in all of its forms," Yankelovich says. "To me, the best way of thinking about it is that people are now free to say: 'I didn't do anything wrong. I didn't break the law.' An earlier generation, my own generation growing up in the United States, would say, 'What has the law got to do with it?' The usual model for societies

is that they have a very thin layer of law and a very thick layer of social morality. What this expressive individualism has done, as an unintended consequence, is weaken that layer of social morality to the point where it's almost disappeared."