



# The Country Preacher's Newsletter

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## Growing Up in Christ

By Randall F. Matheny

Almost everyone enjoys watching children grow up. When they are in their tender, younger years they seem to change so quickly in so many ways. As children most of us probably took pleasure in indications of growth such as reaching a level with

Daddy's belt, a steadily rising series of marks on the door post, outgrown clothes and shoes. A

sense of accomplishment and fulfillment filled the breast with pride! I cannot think of a three year old that I have ever met who did not want to be four; a twelve year old, thirteen; or a nineteen year old, twenty. At some point though, in adulthood, aging becomes less of a thing to be anticipated and the carefree days of youth a thing to be longed for, but that is not the natural order of things.

Putting physical growth aside, we all have room to grow spiritually and must do so if we are to be pleasing to the Lord and useful in His service. We are commanded,

*“Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious (1 Pet. 2:1-3).”* What might be some of the indications of spiritual growth? Perhaps some of the following will help, though no

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doubt you can think of more.

The mark of *compassion*, when we finally come to esteem others better than ourselves (Phil 2:3). The mark of *obedience*, when the premier question becomes, “How can I get it done?” Rather than, “Someone else will take care of it.” (James 1:22-25). The mark of *service*, when the greatest happiness is derived from giving rather than receiving (Acts 20:35). The mark of *faithfulness*, when doing the will of God is without exception the first priority (Mat. 6:33). The mark of *empathy*, when we, like Jesus, begin to look upon the world of the

lost with lamentation (Lk. 13:34-35). The mark of *commitment*, when we truly give diligence to be workmen approved of God (2 Tim. 2:15; Jn. 8:31). The mark of *fellowship*, when cannot stand to miss an assembly of the Saints and arrange our affairs based upon our Christianity, rather than trying to find time for Christ amidst the affairs of life (Heb. 10:23-27; Mat. 10:37-39).

These are but a few things to think of and aspire to achieve as we “grow up in Christ” (Eph. 4:11-16). As we reach these marks of spiritual growth the sense of satisfaction and accomplishment to be felt as a mature Christian will be greater than any other that we have ever known.

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## Grace, Faith and Obedience

By Randall F. Matheny

*“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good*

works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them (Eph. 2:8-10).” These verses have inspired some and perplexed others. Doctrines have evolved isolating each of the three actions mentioned here to the exclusion of the others, for example, the extreme doctrines of salvation by grace alone, salvation by faith alone and salvation by meritorious works alone. In reality, all three play unique, but complementary, roles in the gospel plan of salvation.

Grace is generally defined as “unmerited favor,” which may be understood from the following verses: “...the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men (Tit. 2:11),” “...grace and truth came by Jesus Christ (Jn. 1:17),” and “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Rom 5:8).” Hence, grace is from God, through Christ, to sinners, who in that corrupt state are incapable of meriting a divine gift. It stands to reason that if man had deserved Jesus, he would not have needed Him to die as the final sacrifice for sin. But, since that was not the case God extended grace through His Son, not in response to man’s merit, but to call for man’s response.

“But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Heb 11:6).” Faith that pleases God involves coming to God, diligently seeking Him, believ-

**God’s extension of grace must be met by man’s “obedience to the faith (Rom. 1:5)” and “obedience of faith (Rom. 16:26)” in order to result in salvation.**

ing that He is and that He will reward these efforts. “Jesus answered and said to them, This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent (John 6:29).” The word “work” in this verse is from *ergon*, meaning a deed, action; task, occupation, undertaking; practical expression. These verses show conclusively that faith is more that mental activity. Further, 1 Thes. 1:3, 2 Thes. 1:11 and Jas. 2:14-26 add to the evidence that faith is much more that simple mental acceptance, assent or trust. These things are all important, for faith must begin in the mind, but faith must be developed and strengthened until it manifests itself in action before it becomes acceptable to God and sufficient unto salvation. “...though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of

eternal salvation to all who obey Him (Heb. 5:8-9).” Faith, devoid of obedience, cannot save (Jas. 2:24) and is no better than the dead belief of demons (Jas. 2:19). Ephesians 2:8-10 denies the efficacy of works of merit, which would include the works of the law of Moses, but affirms the obedience of faith in works that have been “prepared beforehand” for the one who would be a Christian. God’s extension of grace must be met by man’s “obedience to the faith (Rom. 1:5)” and “obedience of faith (Rom. 16:26)” in order to result in salvation.

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