

The Four Key Concepts

1. Sin—What Keeps Us From Being Close to God

In order to understand anything else in the Bible we must first understand sin. We cannot grasp why there is so much hardship in this world and in our life unless we understand sin. We cannot appreciate our need for a Savior unless we understand sin. The portions of Scripture used in this Bible study are the ones that deal most directly with this issue. As we look at these passages, we will answer the following questions:

- Where did sin originate?
- What exactly is “sin”?
- Who is guilty of sin?
- What are the consequences of sin?

Where did sin originate?

Genesis 1:31	God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.
2 Peter 2:4	God did not spare the angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell.
Genesis 3:1-15	<i>Read this in the Bible.</i>
1 John 3:8	He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning.

What is the answer to the question, “Where did sin originate?”

What exactly is “sin”?

- Genesis 8:21 Every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood.
- Genesis 5:3 [Adam] had a son in his own likeness, in his own image.
- Psalms 51:5 Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.
- John 3:6 Flesh gives birth to flesh.
- Romans 7:18 I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature.
- Romans 8:7 The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God, it does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so.
- Ephesians 2:3 Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.

Every human being inherits sin from his or her parents. That inherited sin is as dangerous and damnable as any other sin, and the “sinful nature” that we inherit from our parents impacts our life in a negative way.

- Matthew 15:19 Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.
- Matthew 5:28 [Jesus said] I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.
- 1 John 3:15 Anyone who hates his brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him.
- 1 John 3:4 Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness.
- James 2:10 Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.

We commit sin when we break God’s _____. The sinful condition we were born with leads to sins of thought, word, and deed. “Sin” includes all the bad things we do and all the good things we don’t do.

- sin _____
- trespass _____
- iniquity _____

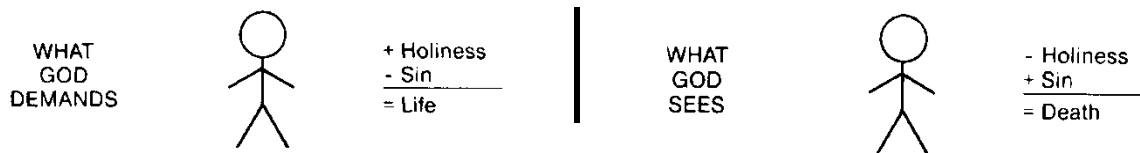
Who is guilty of sin?

**If we are speaking about “original (inherited) sin,” the answer is “everyone.”
Consider also the problem of “actual sin.”**

- Leviticus 19:2 Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy.
(“holy” means being perfect and righteous and without sin)
- Matthew 22:37, 39 Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind . . . Love your neighbor as yourself.
- Matthew 5:48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.
- Psalms 14:2-3 The Lord looks down from heaven on all mankind to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. All have turned away, all have become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one.
- Romans 3:23 All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God . . .

What is the answer to the question, “Who is guilty of sin?”

What God demands in his law is that we live a holy, perfect life . . . a life that has NO sin. However, what he sees is a life that is corrupted by sin and, therefore, falls short of the perfection he demands.



What are the consequences of sin?

Isaiah 59:2	Your iniquities have separated you from your God.
Galatians 3:10	Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the law.
Romans 6:23a	The wages of sin is death.
Ezekiel 18:4	The one who sins is the one who will die.
Matthew 25:41	Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

Sin causes a separation between God and people. Because all people are sinners, all deserve to be damned, eternally separated from God's love.

What is the answer to the question, "What are the consequences of sin?"

Summary

Some time after God created the universe, some of the spirit beings (angels) which he had created rebelled against his authority. God cast them away from his loving presence. From then on, the devil (chief among the fallen angels) plotted to get people away from God. The devil (also called "Satan") deceived Adam and Eve and tempted them to sin. They believed the devil's lie and ruined the perfect relationship they had with God.

Some people think they can get close to God by trying to do good. Some people think they can get close to God by doing more good than bad. Some people think that God won't be very angry with them because others are more sinful than they are. But none of that kind of thinking is correct.

Without a Savior we would be damned, for we have sinned against God and have earned his punishment. Because we are all born with sin, we cannot supply the perfect obedience which God demands. Therefore no one, not even a Christian keeps God's law (his demand to be perfect) well enough to get into heaven. Rather we have sinned and have earned the punishment of eternal death and damnation. ONLY GOD HIMSELF COULD SAVE US FROM THAT!

Discussion starters

1. Satan and his angels were created by God.
2. Satan is a real person.
3. Although children learn bad habits from others, basically they are good and want to do what is right.
4. God is not angry if we sin accidentally.
5. Sinful actions (such as killing someone or stealing) are worse than sinful speech (such as lying or cursing), and sinful speech is worse than sinful thoughts (such as lust or hatred).
6. No one is able to live according to God's law.
7. God is not fair if he punishes good people for their sins.
8. God is too kind to send anyone to hell.
9. We all deserved to be damned.

In our worship

In some orders of worship there is a psalm sung right after the sermon. The words are a portion of Psalm 51. Take a look at it in *Christian Worship*, p. 20.

Consider also the "Proper Preface" for the season of Lent in *The Common Service, Christian Worship* p. 21, and note how those preparatory words before the Lord's Supper put us in mind of the historic and momentous events of Genesis 3.

Since every person is lost in sin, does that mean that we will experience the punishment of hell? That's the main focus of the second key concept—GRACE.

Ephesians 2:4-5 Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions— IT IS BY GRACE YOU HAVE BEEN SAVED.

The Four Key Concepts

2. Grace—What Brings Us Close to God

In the last lesson, we looked at the utter hopelessness of mankind and the inability of anyone to save themselves from the consequences of their sin. In this lesson, we're going to look at God's response to that hopelessness—grace. Here are the questions we will answer in this lesson:

- What is God's "grace"?
- What was God's gracious plan for rescuing sinners?
- How did God carry out his gracious plan?
- What is the result of God's gracious plan?
- How can we be certain that God's gracious plan to rescue sinners is true?

What is God's grace?

- | | |
|--------------------|--|
| 1 Timothy 2:4 | This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. |
| 2 Peter 3:9 | [God] is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. |
| Titus 3:4, 5 | When the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. |
| Ephesians 2:4-5, 8 | But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God. |

What is the answer to the question, "What is God's 'grace'?"

True or false:

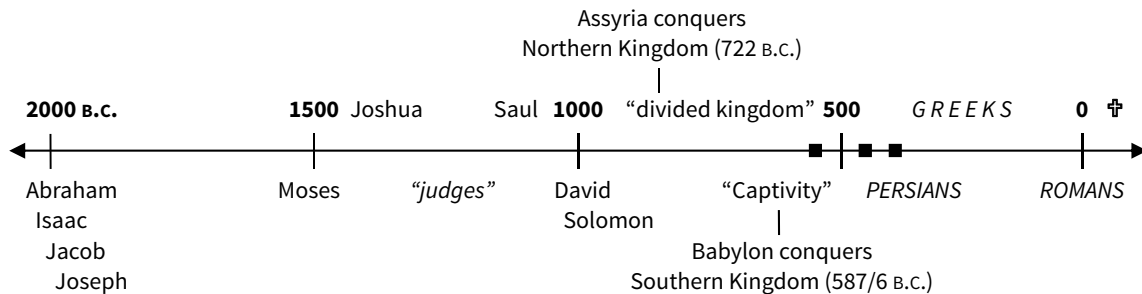
- ___ God's grace is the love that we earn when we keep his law.
- ___ God's grace is the justice he shows by punishing the wicked and rewarding the good.
- ___ God's grace is the undeserved love that he gives to all people as a gift.
- ___ God's grace is the love that he shows people when they first love others.

What was God’s gracious plan for rescuing sinners?

- John 3:16 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.
- 1 John 4:9-10 This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.
- Galatians 4:4, 5 When the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.

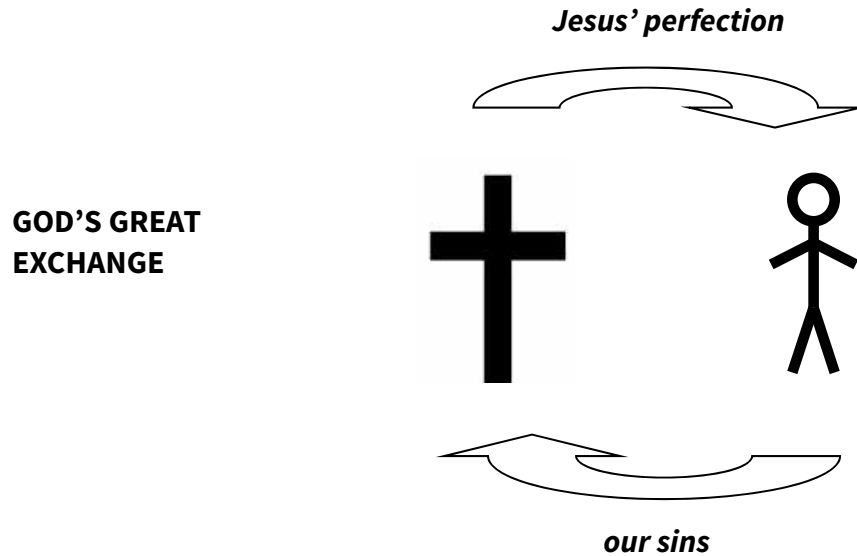
God’s grace, the undeserved love he has for humankind, is seen most clearly when we look at his Son who came to this world to live perfectly and to die to pay for our sins.

How did God carry out his gracious plan?



For a one-line summary of each of the books of the Old Testament, see Appendix. For a more detailed summary of Old Testament history, see Appendix.

- 2 Corinthians 5:21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.
- 2 Timothy 1:10 Our Savior, Christ Jesus, . . . has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.



God made Jesus guilty of our sins and punished him in our place. Jesus led the perfect life that we could not live, and God credited his perfection to our account. Jesus died the death we deserved, and God credited his death as the full payment for all our sins. This “Great Exchange” is full and free and for everyone. “God’s Great Exchange” is the only correct answer to life’s biggest question: “How do I get close to God?”

What is the result of God’s gracious plan?

- Romans 3:24 . . . (all) are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.
- Romans 6:23 . . . but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
- Romans 8:1 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.
- 2 Timothy 1:9, 10 This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

God wanted us to be perfect. He wanted us to obey his laws exactly. But instead we sinned, and earned God’s anger. In holy fairness and justice he ought to punish us and everyone with eternal death. But God still loved his disobedient children, and for that reason alone he sent us a Savior. That Savior was his own Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus took our guilt upon himself and endured God’s punishment for our sins. Now God no longer must punish us for our sin. He punished Jesus, our Substitute. He now gives eternal life to all. Those who believe that Jesus has saved them will enjoy the free gift which God offers to all.

How can we be certain that God's gracious plan to rescue sinners is true?

Matthew 28:5 The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said."

Luke 24:37 *(After Jesus' death and resurrection he miraculously appeared to his disciples.)*
[The disciples] were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. [Jesus] said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have."

1 Corinthians 15:17 If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.

Summary

In spite of our repulsive sinfulness, God still loved us. He did not want to see us punished for our sins. Therefore, God sent his own Son, Jesus Christ, to save us.

Discussion starters

1. God loves all good people.
2. God forgives people when they try to do better.
3. Jesus loved us by living a sinless life.
4. God forgives us because Jesus died in our place.
5. God shows love and offers forgiveness to those in whom he sees some merit.
6. God made Jesus guilty of our sins.
7. God saved sinners through Jesus Christ.

In our worship

Consider the meaning and purpose of “Confession & Absolution.” *Christian Worship*, p. 15, 26, 38.

One of the oldest and grandest hymns of the Christian church is the “Lamb of God” (known also by its Latin name, *Agnus Dei*). Check the simple, yet dignified text of this ancient song, *Christian Worship*, p. 35.

God’s grace is the undeserved love he showed to all humankind. It moved him to send his Son Jesus to pay for all the sins of all people. But, unfortunately, not all people receive the benefits of Christ’s death and resurrection. Why do some receive eternal life and not others? That is the focus of our next key concept—**FAITH**.

Ephesians 2:6-8 God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by Grace you have been saved, **THROUGH FAITH . . .**

The Four Key Concepts

3. Faith—The Gift of a Personal Connection Close to God

Because of what Jesus, our Substitute, has done, God declared all people to be innocent in his sight. We might assume, then, that all people are going to heaven. That is not true. The Scriptures clearly state that God “will punish those who do not know God and do not obey [that is, believe and put into practice] the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord” (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9). So how do all of the good things earned by Jesus become our own personal possession? The answer revolves around the third key concept—faith. Here are the questions we will answer in this lesson:

- What is “faith”?
- How do we get faith?

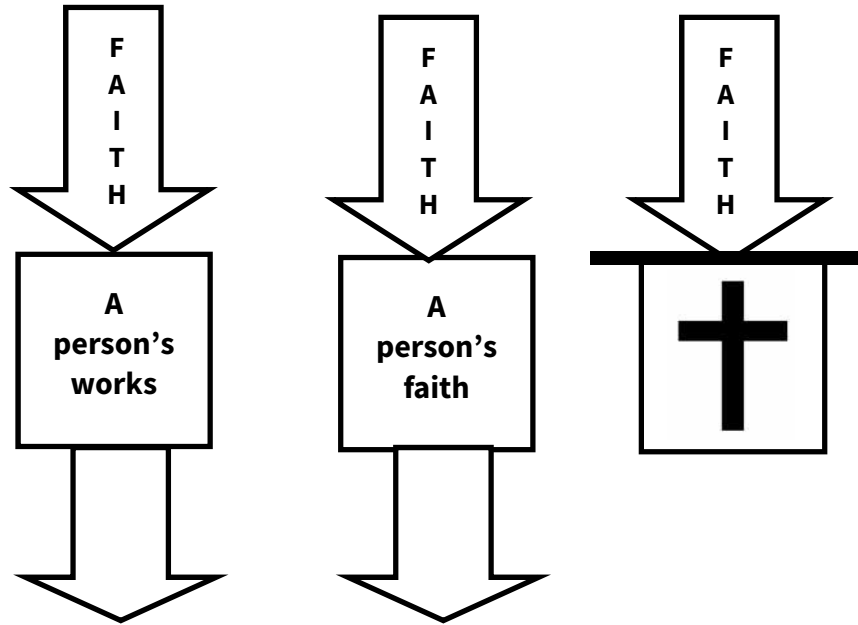
What is faith?

James 2:19	You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.
Hebrews 11:1	Faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance of what we do not see.
Ephesians 2:8-9	It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.
Romans 5:1	Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

The demons know that Jesus is the Son of God. Therefore faith is more than just simple head-knowledge about who Jesus is.

Faith is trust that what God says in the Bible is true.

Faith is also “leaning on something” (the *object* of faith).



(circle one)

WE ARE SAVED BECAUSE OF OUR FAITH

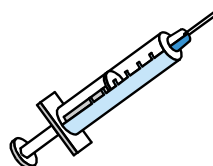
**WE ARE SAVED BECAUSE OF THE OBJECT
OF OUR FAITH – JESUS CHRIST**



Think of sin as a terrible disease which, if left untreated, always results in death.



**Think of God's gracious gift of Jesus Christ and his
righteousness as the antidote to our sin.**



**Think of faith as the way God gives
you the antidote to sin – the benefits
of Christ's death and resurrection.**

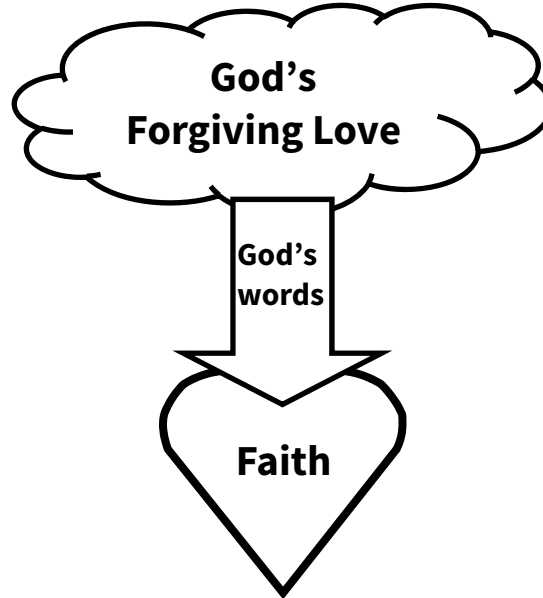
**When you received the injection of that antidote and your life was saved, you probably
wouldn't sing the praises of the hypodermic needle. You would sing the praises of the
antidote. The needle had to be there, or you wouldn't have received the antidote. But
you know that the needle isn't what saved you.**

**In a similar way, faith has to be there if someone is going to be saved. However, we
know faith isn't the cause of salvation. Salvation is the result of the object of our faith,
Jesus Christ. Through faith we receive the benefits of his work.**

How do we get faith?

Romans 10:17

Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.



Hebrews 4:12

The word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

2 Timothy 3:15

From infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

2 Thess. 2:13,14

But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters loved by the Lord, because God chose you as firstfruits to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jeremiah 23:29

“Is not my word like fire,” declares the Lord, “and like a hammer that breaks rock in pieces?”

Romans 1:16

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.

Answer to the question, “How do we get faith?”

Summary

Jesus died for the sins of the whole world. He earned forgiveness for everyone. Sad to say, many do not accept this truth. Thus they deprive themselves of the salvation that Christ has won for them. Only those who believe in Jesus as their Savior will finally enjoy eternal life. But even this faith is not our doing. God the Holy Spirit comes to us through the Word of God. With the “Means of grace” he gives us faith to believe what God teaches, especially that Jesus is the Savior and Lord and because of what he did we are close to God.

Faith is more than head-knowledge, more than just knowing what Jesus did. Faith is the confidence of the heart that what God says about sin and about the Savior is true. Faith is the confidence that through Jesus we have eternal life.

The Bible is the source of Christian faith. Its purpose is to make us “wise for salvation.” Although it does not answer every idle speculation, in the vital area of learning how we can be close to God now and forever the Bible is complete. We do not need, nor do we anticipate additional revelations from God.

Discussion starters

1. The devil does not believe that Jesus died for the sins of the world.
2. Jesus also paid for the sins of those who go to hell.
3. Those who believe in God will be saved.
4. It doesn't make any difference what you believe as long as you are sincere.
5. If you're not sincere, it doesn't make any difference what you profess to believe.
6. We will go to heaven if we believe in Jesus and try to live according to our faith.
7. Faith comes to those who pray for it.
8. A good pastor will bring many people to faith.

In our worship

Again and again in our worship we say, “Amen.” “Amen” is actually a Hebrew word which means “Yes, I believe it's true!”

Our being close to God is entirely God's doing. This raises the logical question, “What about living a good life? How does that fit in? That is the focus of our final key concept—WORKS.

Ephesians 2:10 We are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do GOOD WORKS, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

The Four Key Concepts

4. Works—How We Live Close to God

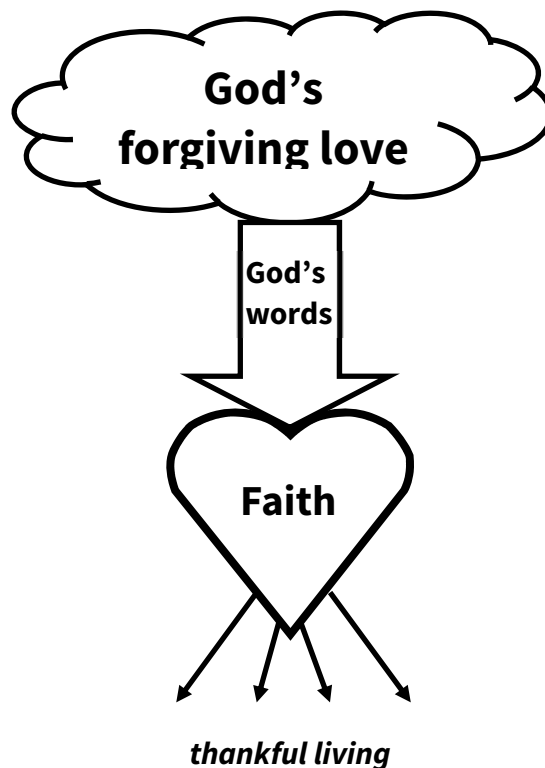
In the previous lessons we have learned what God has done for us. Now we turn to God and ask, “Lord, what can we do? Can we do anything to assure our close relationship with you? Can we do anything to finish the work of saving us which you have begun? How about this: Can we say, “Thank you?” Our being close to God depends entirely on him. Jesus Christ is the one who made the complete payment for our sins. The Holy Spirit is the one who creates saving faith in our hearts. Our response of thanks is called “thankful living” or “the fruits of faith” or “good works.” That is the focus of our final key concept—works. Here are the questions we will answer in this lesson:

- What are “good works”?
- What guidance does God give to help us do “good works”?
- What about other rules that people add to God’s commands?

What are “good works”?

Luke 19:1-10

Read this in the Bible.



- 1 John 4:19 We love because he first loved us.
- 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those live who should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.
- Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.
- Philippians 2:13 It is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.
- Psalms 119:105 Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.

What guidance does God give to help us do “good works”?

Romans 13:10 Love is the fulfillment of the law.

God's law can be summarized in one word: _____

Matthew 22:37, 39 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind . . . Love your neighbor as yourself.

God's law can be summarized in two phrases:

_____ and _____

God's law can also be summarized in many other words and phrases:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

God's law serves as a _____ to show how damaging, dangerous, and damnable our sin is.

BUT SINCE GOD HAS REMOVED OUR SIN FROM HIS SIGHT BY THE BLOOD OF JESUS,

God's law now serves as a _____ for thankful living.
(Thankful living is also called "fruits of faith" or "good works.")

Some special terms:

Salvation	God has rescued us (saved us) from the control and consequences of sin.
Justification	All sinners are declared just, holy, or "not guilty" by God for the sake of Jesus and his work as Substitute. Justification is perfect and complete.
Sanctification	Those who trust in Jesus are "set apart" from the unbelieving world to lead a God-pleasing life. Sanctification is gradual and always incomplete in this life.
Discipleship	Following Jesus and growing in thankful living.

What about other rules that people add to God's commands?

Mark 7:6-8 These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules. You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions.

As if God's law weren't enough, people have always added their own laws and traditions, considering them a special sort of worship or service of God, a more heightened spirituality. Jesus and the Bible writers reject such opinions.

Summary

Thanks to Jesus' substitutionary work, God declares us to be perfect even though we are not. But while we live in this world, we still carry with us our old sinful condition. Therefore, on our own we are not and cannot be perfect. Rather we agree with the statement, "Christians are not perfect, just forgiven." The Christian is no longer coerced by fear and the threat of eternal judgment but energized by Christ's love to love both God and others. The reason for all this loving and doing good is not to earn salvation by our own good deeds, but rather to thank God for the salvation which is already assured. In reality it is God's Spirit who gives us this new power through the words and promises of God in Scripture.



Think about apple trees. Why is it that they produce apples? Is it because they'll feel guilty if they don't? Is it because they will be in some sort of trouble if they don't produce enough fruit? That's foolish! Apple trees produce apples because that's just what apple trees do. It's natural.

Christians produce good works, not because they'll feel guilty if they don't, and not because they're afraid that otherwise they'll get in trouble with God. Christians produce good works because Christ gave them the power to do so. It's what they naturally do!

John 15:4-5

[Jesus said,] "Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

Discussion starters

1. Without love no one can obey God's commands.
2. You can't live a perfectly holy life until you become a Christian.
3. The work of Jesus Christ as our Substitute and Sin-bearer gives us the chance to win eternal life by following his example.
4. Christians, who are declared innocent, still continue to commit sins because their sinful nature still desires to disobey God.
5. A Christian does not go to heaven because of his good works.
6. God doesn't care whether a Christian does good works or not.
7. The best good works are those done for the church.
8. Some people are too busy to do good works.
9. As long as the church work gets done, it doesn't matter why you do it.
10. Saving faith will always produce good works; it will not produce them perfectly.

In our worship

At the conclusion of some orders of worship, the presiding minister offers words of exhortation (*Christian Worship*, pp. 37 and 44).

This concludes our study of the four key concepts—SIN, GRACE, FAITH, and WORKS. A firm grasp on these four concepts will give you a solid foundation upon which to build with further Bible study. May God bless your study and grant you the full assurance that you are Christ's and that Christ is yours.