

SPIRITUAL MATURITY: What is it?

2

Taking on the family likeness

In Ephesians 4:12-14, Paul tells us that Jesus gave the church pastors and teachers "to equip God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." Whatever that means, when it happens, Paul says "we will no longer be infants..."

We hear a lot of talk in the church about "spiritual growth," "spiritual maturity," "keeping God's law," "being like Jesus," etc., and so we should. God wants his children to bear the family likeness.

So, Peter writes, *As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."* — 1Peter1:14-16 quoting Lev.11:45 and 19:2.

And Paul says that in the light of God's mercy toward us, the only reasonable response is: *"present your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God. This is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind (metamorphosis). Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."* - Rom.12:1,2



Taking on the family likeness
- in purely human terms.

But, if we agree God wants us to mature, two questions come immediately to mind, questions that are the primary focus of *Grace4Life*:

First, exactly *what is* spiritual maturity? What does it look like? Can we measure it, quantify it?

Second, how do I get there? What is it that can take me from spiritual infancy to adulthood? In other words, what are the *spiritual mechanics* of Christian growth?

Answering the first of those questions is the purpose of this lesson. We want to define our target. Like the old adage says, *"Aim at nothing and you'll hit it every time!"* The second question, the "how to," is equally important, and we'll be majoring on that in Lesson 4.

So, what is holiness? Next week, if you were three times more holy than you are today, how would people know? Would you have sprouted wings or be sporting a glitzy halo round your head? Seriously, how *would* they know? Maybe you would have become very serious, somber, stuffy, and a real stickler for the rules?

We bring you good news! Being holy is not about struggling to keep a set of rules—even good ones. Holiness is quite simply about love—loving God and loving other people. Simplistic? Not at all.

In Lesson 1, we defined *the essence of sin*. We asked, "Why did our mum and dad eat the apple?" The answer was: S _____ S _____-L _____. In this lesson, we want to define *the essence of holiness*—reduce holiness to it's most basic level.

Think about it. If the essence of sin is sinful self-love, the essence of holiness must be its exact opposite—selfless love for God and others. When we begin to think of the Christian life in these terms, it all gets quite simple—not easy, just simple.

Wonder of wonders, we will find that when we love God and others well, we also keep the whole law. *Really?* Yes. When we love, we avoid all the sinful and hurtful behaviour the law forbids and so become the sort of people God (and everyone else) wants us to be. Maturity is about allowing the Gospel to change us so that we can enjoy the most God glorifying and personally satisfying relationships imaginable. Holiness is about loving and being loved in ways this lost and lonely world can only dream about.

— JWJ —

I. "THE THREE LEVELS OF THE LAW"

Examine the chart on page 2-5 and fantasise: You are such a smashing success as a discipler, your students keep Level 1 perfectly. Even more amazing, they have also mastered Level 2. Are you done? It is time to retire? Hardly! Something rather fundamental is lacking. What is it?

II. SEEING THE LAW AS LOVE: Let's let the Bible define holiness for us.

A. JESUS:

1. Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this

question: "which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: "**Love** the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: '**Love** your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

— **Matt.22:34-40** (See: Deut.6:5; Lev.19:18)

Questions: What does it mean that all the law and prophets hang on these two commandments?

2. One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"²⁹ "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.'³⁰ **Love** the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'³¹ The second is this: '**Love** your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."³² "Well said, teacher," the man replied. "You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him."³³ To **love** him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to **love** your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."³⁴ When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." (!) And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions. — **Mk.12:28-34**

3. A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have **loved** you, so you must **love** one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples—if you **love** one another.

— **Jn.13:34-35** **Question:** New? Why new?

4. My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message (**us**),²¹ that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us **so that** the world may believe that you have sent me.²² I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one:²³ I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have **loved** them even as you have **loved** me. — **Jn.17:20-24**

Dr. Francis Schaeffer said these two passages in John teach love as "the final apologetic"—the ultimate argument for the validity of the Gospel message. **a.** In 13:35 Jesus gives the world the right to judge the validity of our profession by the quality of our love. **b.** But in John 17:21 and 23 he says something far more serious—that our Christian unity will prove to the world that he was indeed sent from the Father. So, as we love one another, we are preaching Christ to the world! Might the converse be equally true?

B. JAMES: If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "**love** your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right. But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. — **Jas.2:8-10** **Question:** How is favoritism a failure to love?

C. PAUL:

1. Romans: Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to **love** one another, for he who **loves** his fellow man has fulfilled the law. [**He can't be serious!**] The commandments, "do not commit adultery," "do not murder," "do not steal," "do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be (!) are summed up in this one rule: "**Love** your neighbour as yourself." **Love** does no harm to its neighbour. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. — **Rom.13:8-10** **Questions:** Isn't this heretical? What happened to "the first and greatest commandment" regarding our love for God? (See 1Jn.4:20.)

2. Galatians: For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value.

The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through **love** — **Gal.5:6**. Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation

“the only thing that counts”

— **Gal.6:15**. Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God's commands is what counts — **1 Cor.7:19**. **What? Question:** Isn't this contradictory? What is the only thing that counts?

3. 1 Thessalonians: 1:2,3 We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers.³ We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by **love**, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

3:6-12 But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and **love**...⁷ Therefore, brothers, in all our distress and persecution we were encouraged about you because of your faith.⁸ For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord.⁹ How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you?¹⁰ Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith... (!)¹² May the Lord make your **love** increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you.¹³ May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.

4:9-12 Now about brotherly **love** we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to **love** each other. ¹⁰ And in fact, you do **love** all the brothers throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so more and more. **(!)** ¹¹ Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, ¹² so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.

[Evangelistic witness]

5:8 But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and **love** as a breast-plate **(!)** and the hope of salvation as a helmet...

5:12,13 Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. ¹³ Hold them in the highest regard in **love** because of their work. Live in peace with each other.

4. 2 Thessalonians 1:3 We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the **love** every one of you has for each other is increasing. **[Paul's prayer answered!]**

REACT: Even though we have only scratched the surface of the Bible's teaching on love, from what we have seen, how would you define holiness/spiritual maturity/Christlikeness?

Spiritual maturity/Holiness is:

IV. CHART: "THE LOOK OF LOVE"

Our premise: If we are ever to be like Jesus (the only perfect person who ever lived) we must learn to *love* like Jesus. All the fruits of holiness flow from love, and all the fruits of the flesh flow from a lack thereof.

STUDY the chart on page 2-6, "The Look of Love" —a graphical analysis of Jesus style of relating to people contrasted with our normal (fleshly) style of relating.

V. SUMMING UP: How important is love?

A. 1 Corinthians 13: The primacy of love

¹ If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not **love**, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ² If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not **love**, I am nothing. ³ If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not **love**, I gain nothing.

⁴ **Love** is patient, **love** is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ **Love** does not delight in

evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

⁸ **Love** never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. ⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰ but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears.

¹¹ **When I was a child**, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.

¹² Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

¹³ And now these three remain: faith, hope and **love**. But the greatest of these is... **love**.

B. WHAT'S THE USE of my insisting I'm a "great lover" if people don't feel loved by me?

Four sobering questions:

If we interviewed the people closest to you, would they say they feel loved by you?

Do the people in your family feel loved by you?

Do the people in your church or on your ministry team feel loved by you?

Or... is your love conditional? Meaning: Do you make them feel they can't measure up to your standards? Do they feel disapproved of, judged or even condemned by you? Do they get the impression they can never earn your affection?

If God related to you the way you relate to others, how would you feel right now today?

FACT: If the people round me don't feel loved by me, it is because I am not loving them well.

FACT: When we love people as Jesus loves us, they will not be left in doubt about it! (Jn.13:35)

Painful? Yes, for us all. So...

C. WHERE CAN WE GET LOVE LIKE THIS?

Where can we get the *power* to love other sinners with Jesus' love? From only one source: "The fruit of the Spirit is love...."

But, we are already indwelt by the Spirit, so why aren't we better lovers? Why don't we manifest more of his fruit? Where is the disconnect? What is the mechanism of spiritual growth? Must we just buck up? Try harder?

Enter the Gospel. Simplistic? Not at all, as we will see clearly in the next 3 lessons.

Lesson 3: J by F (Justification by Faith)

Lesson 4: How 2 Change and Lead Others 2 Change

Lesson 5: Dependence on the Spirit for Life & Ministry



GRACE ASSIGNMENTS

1. READ "A Perfect Mess" by Becky Long (2-11). CONTINUE memorising Galatians 4:4-7.

2. MEMORISE our simplified version of the Ten Commandments below. Think of the Law as a signpost pointing in the direction of love. It cannot take us all the way to the destination, but if we fail to move in their direction, we are not on the road leading to perfect love.

First Tablet of the Law - Our duty to God:

1. No other gods
2. No idols
3. Honour God's Name
4. Honour God's Day

Second Tablet of the Law - Our duty to Others:

5. Honour Parents (authority)
6. No Murder
7. No Adultery
8. No Stealing
9. No Lying
10. No Coveting (invisible - viz. Rom.7:7,8)



3. IF you have not done "The Sinfulness of Sin Workshop," pick one of the sins at the top left column and, using that sin, carry it through to the end. See page 2-9.

4. An **OPTIONAL** reading for the theologically minded: **The Sum of Saving Knowledge, page 2-7.** This document gives a fascinating glimpse into the conflict between law and grace during the Puritan era here. Had the balance seen here been maintained, the spiritual vigor of the Evangelical movement in the British Isles would have increased rather than waned. What you see in this document is actually 17th Century **Grace4Life!**

5. An **OPTIONAL Individual or Group Exercise (very helpful and revealing)**

This will demonstrate the simple truth that **love** is the very essence of holiness—the truth of Jesus' statement that "all the law and prophets hang on these two commandments," and, the truth of Paul's bold claim that "love is the fulfillment of the law."

INSTRUCTIONS: A. Think of ANY commandment in the Bible, ANY good thing we might be called to do as we relate to God and others, ANY holy quality we might display, and show how LOVE is at the root of it. B. Next, using the same righteous act, think of how SIN might motivate it.

EVERY RIGHTEOUS ACT is an act of love and is motivated by love.

1. giving money to the work of the Kingdom
2. serving others
3. sharing the Gospel (what constrains us?)
4. correcting another person
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.

EVERY SIN is an act of self-love and is motivated by self-centeredness (our "godness")

1. giving money to the work of the Kingdom
2. serving others
3. sharing the Gospel (what constrains us?)
4. correcting another person
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.



Solving the mystery: What is true holiness?

LEVEL 1



OUTWARD Obedience: Nursery School NOT SINNING ON THE OUTSIDE

The Law of Moses (Focus: external rules)

The Ten Commandments - simple form: 1. No other gods, 2. No idols, 3. Honour God's name, 4. Honour God's day, 5. Honour parents (authority), 6. No murder, 7. No adultery, 8. No stealing, 9. No lying, 10. No coveting.

SO, WE THINK: "Today I didn't kill anyone, rob a bank, sleep with another's wife or tell a lie, or... Therefore I have done well; I am holy; truly, I have kept the law!"

THE TRUTH: Problem. That's a good start, but the Pharisees did that. They were just "SIN MANAGERS!" Rotten eggs look good... on the outside.

Jesus peered into the Pharisees' hearts and said, "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and self-indulgence. Woe to you... You are like whitewashed tombs which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness." – Matt. 23:25-28

What's more, it's possible to obey the law for the wrong reasons—out of fear of punishment (I would if I could and get away with it), or a desire to impress people (love of reputation) rather than out of a genuine love for God and our neighbor. If our hearts are corrupt and out of fellowship with God, what's the use of boasting, "I keep the law"?

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LEVEL 2



INNER Purity: Secondary School THE HEART - THOUGHT & MOTIVE LEVEL

The Sermon on the Mount (Focus: heart purity)

But I say unto you: Don't despise people; don't lust; don't covet; don't give, and fast and pray to be seen by others. **Imagine** an LCD chest implant that shows our thought life in vivid colour!

SO, WE THINK: "Well, I must be holy. I haven't hated anyone, coveted their possessions, had vain or lustful thoughts, etc. I have kept the law!"



THE TRUTH: Not so fast. To be pure in heart is a giant leap ahead of the Pharisees (nursery school), but even so, you have only just begun to keep the law! Why? Because...

Holiness involves more than merely obeying at Levels 1 and 2. It involves a Romans 12 "renewing of our mind" that moves us from self-love and self-centeredness to self-forgetfulness and others-centeredness.

True holiness is Level 3, and the wonderful news is, if you are obedient at Level 3, you are obedient at 1 and 2 as well. Levels 1 and 2 are essentially "negative holiness." We have avoided abusing people, but we haven't **loved** anyone yet. The Bible's fuller definition of the law is: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, strength and mind, and your neighbor as yourself." (Deut. 6:5; Lev. 19:18; Matt. 22:36ff)

Jesus calls us to love at Level 3—what James calls "The Royal Law" of love (Jas. 2:8). What is entailed in Level 3? This is the hard part!

LEVEL 3

LOVE in Action: University FAITH EXPRESSING ITSELF THROUGH LOVE

The New Commandment (Focus: visible love)

"A new commandment I give unto you. Love one another as I have loved you." (Jn. 13:34ff) The new commandment is new because it sets a new standard—Jesus's love for me rather than my love for myself.

SO, WE THINK: "Now I understand. From now on, I'll strive to keep the New Commandment of love. I'll astound the world with my acts of love." Wrong focus!

THE TRUTH: God wants us to focus on *loving people*, not keeping rules. Paul says, "the only thing that counts is faith [in Jesus] expressing itself through love" (Gal.5:6,13,14).

Men: Holiness isn't just avoiding adultery or lust. It's serving women as our sisters with pure hearts! (1 Tim. 5:2)

Women: Holiness isn't just avoiding jealousy or covetousness, it's sharing what God has given us.

The Ephesians 4:28 principle: Paul says, *stop stealing, start working, and start giving!*

Love is our new "heart of flesh" in action—empowered by the Spirit to share the Gospel, to reach out to, bind up, build up, bless, and edify others so that great glory goes to the Father! (Matt. 5:16) Anything less is not biblical holiness.

JESUS did not come to earth, die on a cross, rise from the dead and send us his Spirit to turn us into "I don't" negative holiness people. He wants us to be self-sacrificing lovers of people, just like him!

Specifically how did Jesus love people?



"THE LOOK OF LOVE" - AUTHENTIC CHRISTLIKENESS DEFINED

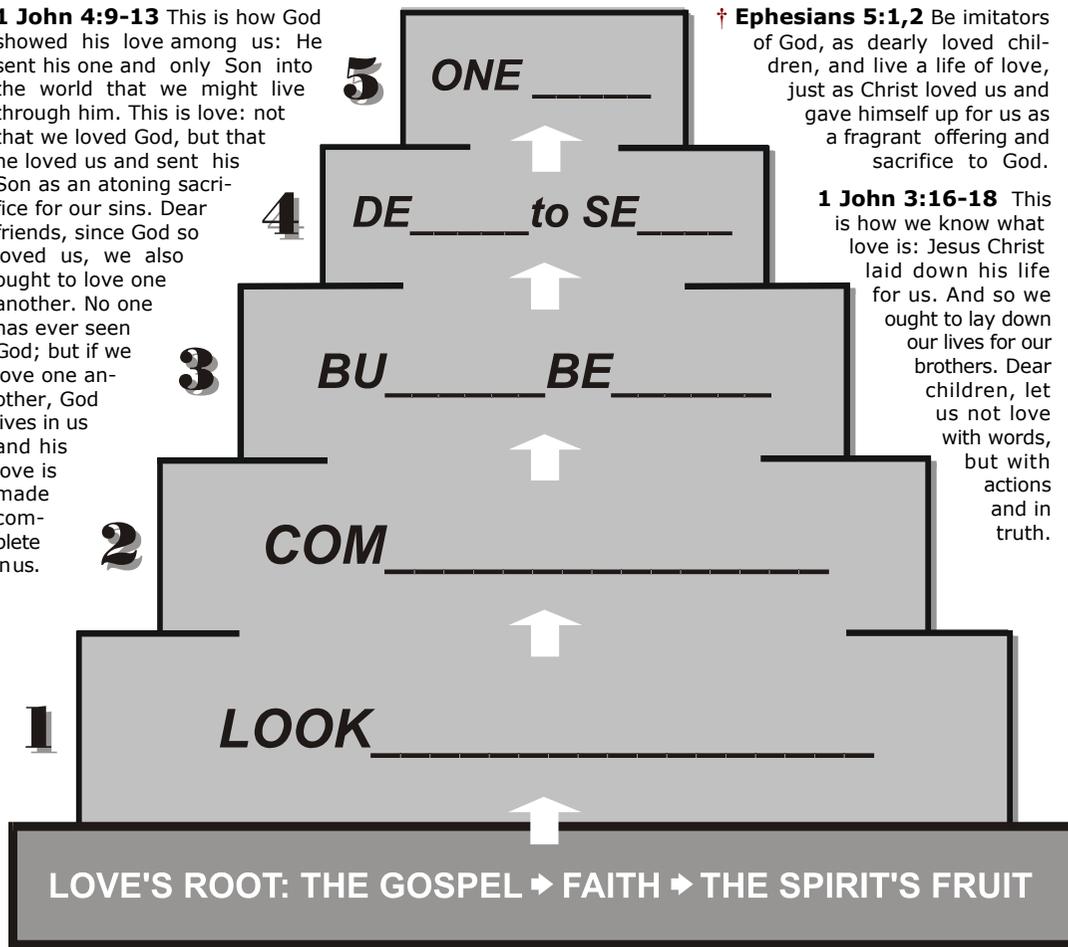
The Fact of the Matter: If we're ever to be like Jesus, we must learn to love like Jesus.

This diagram pictures the flow of Jesus' love in five stages. His love for people was redemptive; ours is not. But, as we live in reliance on the Holy Spirit, we will begin to "mimic God" † by loving others in Jesus-like ways.

1 John 4:9-13 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. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

† **Ephesians 5:1,2** Be imitators of God, as dearly loved children, and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

1 John 3:16-18 This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And so we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. Dear children, let us not love with words, but with actions and in truth.



JESUS' STYLE OF RELATING—AND OURS BY THE SPIRIT

OUR NATURAL (FLESHLY) STYLE OF RELATING

Unity, oneness, openness and intimacy with God and others (Jn. 17:21-23; Col. 2:2)

Shallow relationships, surface communication, resistance to true intimacy

Committed to dying to self in order to live for and bless others

Committed to self-protection and the avoidance of pain and self-sacrifice

Eager to bear one another's burdens - "Let me carry it!" Lk. 10:33ff

Avoidance of the burdens of others - "passing by on the other side" Lk. 10:30ff

Tenderness of heart - "We have a problem." "When you hurt, I hurt." (Rom. 12:15; 1 Cor. 12:25, 26)

Hardness of heart - "You have a problem, not me." When you hurt, I run.

JESUS looks at and talks to people. Gives them dignity. Blind men: Matt. 20:32; John 9:1,2

THE DISCIPLES talk about, not to, the blind man. (Jn. 9:1) When we depersonalise people, love dies. (When we see but don't look.)

LOVE LIKE THIS MUST FLOW FROM A SUPER-NATURAL SOURCE.

THIS IS THE WAY WE "LOVE" APART FROM THE SPIRIT'S POWER

Sanctification: the sure fruit of Gospel faith

THE SUM OF SAVING KNOWLEDGE The Evidences of True Faith †

So much for the laying the foundations of faith and the reasons to believe. To prove that faith is genuine (by fruits), these four things are required:

- (1.) That the believer be fully convinced in his mind of his obligation to keep the whole moral law all the days of his life; not less, but all the more because he has been delivered by Christ from the covenant of works and curse of the law.
- (2.) That he endeavour to grow in the exercise and daily practice of godliness and righteousness.
- (3.) *That the course of his new obedience run in the right channel, that is through faith in Christ, and through a good conscience, to all the duties of love toward God and man.*
- (4.) *That he keep strait communion with the fountain Jesus Christ, the one from whom grace must flow to produce good fruits. . . .* (1973, 339, italics ours).

[Excerpts of the explanation of points (3.) and (4.). Note the emphasis on love as the true evidence of obedience.]

III. The third thing required to demonstrate true faith is, that obedience to the law must run in the right channel, that is, through faith in Christ. I Tim 1:5 – “The goal of this command is love out of a pure heart, and a good conscience, and a sincere faith.”

Here, the apostle teaches these seven doctrines:

1. That the obedience of the law must flow from love, and love from a pure heart, and a pure heart from a good conscience, and a good conscience from a sincere faith. This, he says, is the only right channel of good works: “The end of the law is love...”
2. That the end of the law is not that men may be justified by their obedience to it—as the Jewish doctors falsely taught—for it is impossible for sinners to be justified by the law. With every transgression, we are condemned by the law: “For the end of the law is love out of a pure heart...”—not what the Jewish doctors taught.

3. That the purpose of the law preached to the people is that it makes them see the condemnation they deserve, so that they sincerely flee to Christ to be justified by faith in him. This is what the text says, that love flows through faith in Christ.

4. That a man can resolve to obey the law in love only insofar as his conscience is quieted (or seeking to be quieted) in Christ, for “the end of the law is love out of a good conscience, and a sincere faith.”

5. That false faith attempts to go to Christ without dealing with the law, but sincere faith deals with the law and is therefore forced to flee to Christ for refuge as often as it is guilty of breaking the law: “For the end of the law is a sincere faith.” and, “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness.” [Rom. 10:4]

6. That if the fruits of love are to be seen in actions, it is necessary that the heart be brought to the place of hating all sin and uncleanness, and to a firm resolve to follow holiness in all things at all times. “For the end of the law is love out of a pure heart.”

7. That true faith is able to make the conscience good, the heart pure, and the man lovingly obedient to the law. When Christ’s blood is seen by faith to satisfy justice, the conscience becomes quiet and does not allow the heart to entertain the love of sin. On the contrary, in the fear of God, the believer seeks mercy and wants to obey all his commandments. Because by God’s grace, he has received the free gift of justification, his obedience flows from love for God: “For this is the goal of the law.” So, faith produces more obedience from a man than any other method.

IV. The fourth thing required to demonstrate true faith is keeping strait communion with Christ, the fountain of all graces and of all good works. “*I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing*” Jn. 15:5 By this metaphor of a vine and branches, Christ teaches us:

1. That by nature we are wild, barren thorn bushes until we are changed by coming unto Christ, and that Christ is that noble vine who

† **THIS OLD SCOTTISH PRESBYTERIAN DOCUMENT (1647)** sets forth our (*Grace4Life*) position regarding the New Covenant believer’s relationship to God’s moral law, **1]** That we are obligated to keep the Ten Commandments; **2]** That the power to keep them flows from our conscious union with Jesus Christ by faith *rather than* from a focus on the law’s demands; **3]** That love towards God and man is both the sum and test of our obedience; and, **4]** That the Holy Spirit will supply the power for a changed life as we daily and consciously abide in and rely on Jesus Christ by faith. **NOTE:** The old English is updated at points, and the bold and italic emphases are ours. — **JWL** —

has all life and sap of grace in himself, and who is able to change the nature of every one that comes to him, and to communicate spirit and life to all who believe in him: "I am the vine," he says, "and you are the branches."

2. That Christ loves to have believers so united unto him, that at no time are they separated from him by unbelief so that a mutual indwelling takes place: they in Him (through faith and love), and he in them (by His Word and Spirit). Christ joins these two things together: "If you abide in me—and I in you," showing that they cannot be separated.

3. That a man cannot do any good work in his own strength. Unless a person is engrafted into Christ and united to him by faith, and unless he draws strength and life from Christ by faith, the work which he does is not good, but naughty and null in God's eyes. "For without me," Jesus says, "you can do nothing."

4. That this mutual indwelling is the fountain and infallible cause of constant, continuing, and abounding in well-doing: For "he that abides in me and I in him," Jesus says, "bears much fruit."

Now, our abiding in Christ presupposes three things:

1st, That we have heard the joyful sound of the gospel—Christ making an offer to us lost sinners under the law; **2nd**, That we have heartily embraced the gracious offer of Christ; **3rd**, That by receiving him, we have become the **sons** of God, (John 1:12), and are incorporated into his mystical body so that he may dwell in us as his temple, and we may dwell in him, the source of righteousness and life.

And, our abiding in Christ implies three other things: (1.) That we approach the Father through Christ in all our prayers, and depend on Christ for strength in everything we do to serve him. **(2.)** Being content with his sufficiency, not leaving him to seek righteousness, or life, or anything else in any person or thing. **(3.)** Being steadfast in believing in him and relying on him; being steadfast in our contentment with him and clinging to him, so that no allurements, no temptation of Satan or the world, no terror or trouble, may be able to drive our spirits from adhering firmly to him, or from the constant confession of his truth, obedience to his commands—the one who loves us [Rev. 1:5] and gave himself for us, the one in whom our life is hidden—and more, the one in whom all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in bodily form, the one in whom both the divine and human natures are united, the very person and substance of God himself.

From now on, let every watchful believer reason in this way to strengthen himself in faith and obedience:

"The person who gives proof that he has true faith in Christ is the one who: daily employs Christ Jesus to cleanse his conscience and desires from the guilt and stain of sins against the law, and depends on Christ to enable him to obey the law in love."

And, may every watchful believer say: "I do daily depend on Jesus Christ to cleanse my conscience and desires from the guilt and stain of sins against the law, and to enable me to obey the law in love, therefore, I have the evidence of true faith in myself."

And now, let the *sleepy and sluggish believer* reason in this way to stir himself to action:

"Whatever evidence of true faith is necessary, I will seek it, or I may deceive myself and in the end, perish."

"I will depend on Christ Jesus daily to cleanse my conscience and desires from the guilt and stain of sins against the law, and depend on him to enable me to obey the law in love. This is necessary if I am to show that I have true faith. Therefore I purpose to do these, or I may deceive myself and in the end, perish."

Lastly, Christ himself pointed to this [abiding in him] as an undeniable evidence of someone elected by God to life and given to Christ to be redeemed: "If he comes to me"—that is, if he covenants closely and keeps communion with him. He teaches us in John 6:37: "All that the Father has given me shall come to me; and whoever comes to me, I will never drive away."

Therefore, let every person who does not earnestly make use of Christ for the remission of his sins and the changing of his life heed what we have said and reason this way so that his conscience is awakened:

"Anyone who is not convicted by the law and the Gospel of sin, righteousness, and judgment so that he comes to Christ and relies on him daily for the forgiveness of his sin and the reformation of his life, *lacks any evidence of saving faith* and of his election, as long as he remains in this condition."

And, may every unrepentant person say, "I am neither convicted of sin, righteousness and judgment by either the law or the Gospel, so I have not come to Christ and do not rely on him daily for the forgiveness of my sins and the reformation of my life, therefore, I lack any evidence of saving faith or of my election, as long as I remain in this condition" (*Confession* 1973, 323–342).



† Excerpted from: *Westminster Confession of Faith; the Larger and Shorter Catechisms* with Scripture proofs, together with *The Sum of Saving Knowledge*. Free Presbyterian Publications. 160 Pitt Street. Glasgow, Scotland C.2 1973 (pp. 341–343). First published 1646.

Grace4Life by John Wade Long, Jr. - London UK - www.grace4life.org

The Sinfulness of Sin Workshop

Analysing why sin is sinful

Pick a Sin to Conquer

PICK A SINFUL BEHAVIOR: _____

Choose one: boasting, rage, gossip, class/racism (**N.O.C.D.** - Not Our Class Dear), fornication, lying, criticising.

WHAT forces might lead a **Christian** into this sin?

1. EXTERNAL pressure (things *outside* us)

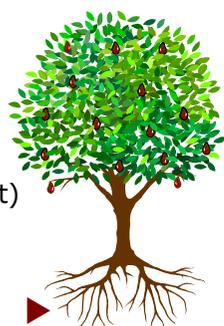
- a.
- b.
- c.

2. INTERNAL pressure (the heart)

- a.
- b.
- c.

3. WHAT PLEASURE does this sin give?
(All behavior is goal oriented, i.e. there's a payoff.)

- a.
- b.



What **root** sin produces this particular **fruit** sin?

NOW, there are two weapons in our arsenal for dealing with sin: the Law (rules), and the Gospel (grace). Using the next two columns, compare and contrast how each works to combat this sin.

Obviously, for the weapon to succeed, it must offer an incentive more powerful than the allurements of the sin. (viz. Thomas Chalmer's sermon *The Explosive Power of a New Affection.*)

the LAW says "Dont'!"

WHICH of the TEN COMMANDMENTS does this sin break? (Think like a Pharisee. Think the *letter*, not the *spirit* of the Law)

Number _____

Q. 1. WHAT METHODS do parents, pastors and teachers usually use to discourage this sin?

- a.
- b.
- c.

Q. 2. IN YOUR VIEW, have these methods been successful? (circle one)

Yes No Sometimes

Q. 3. DEFINE "success": If someone manages to avoid this sin *outwardly*, have they fully kept God's law?

Yes No Possibly (*Explain*)

Q. 4. THINK: Does the **MOTIVE** for our obedience matter to God? Does he care *why* we obey, as long as we obey?

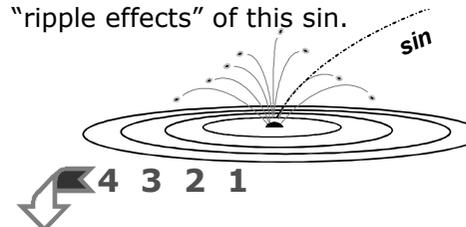
Q. 5. What *inferior* motives might lead us to obey God's law?

- a. fear of ... (1 Jn. 4:18)
- b. desire to look ... (Matt. 23:5; Jn. 5:41)
- c. other?

the GOSPEL says "Love!"

KEY: Sin is sinful because we break "*the rule beneath the rule.*" Rather than love God and others, we hurt or use them. *Explain how this sin is a failure to love.* _____

DETERMINE the immediate *and* longer-term "ripple effects" of this sin.



- 1** On the **SINNER** personally
- 2** On the **VICTIM** of *or* **PARTNER** in the sin
- 3** On **OTHERS** affected by this sin
- 4** **WHO** do you think is *most* injured & why?

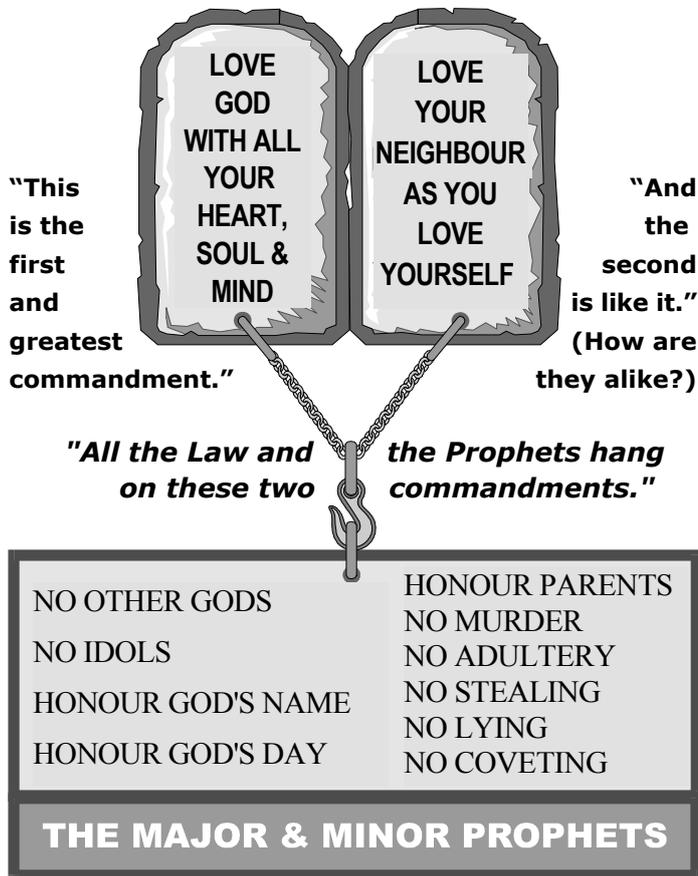
READ: John 15:4,5 & Gal. 3:5. How does faith in Christ enable us to resist this sin?

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER: Gospel faith gives us power over sin because: (1) Faith in Jesus supplies us with the Spirit; (2) the fruit of the Spirit is love, and, (3) when we have loved, we have kept the whole law (Matt.22:36,37; Rom. 13:8-10). Paul calls this "the obedience that comes from faith" (Rom.5:1), and "faith expressing itself through love" (Gal.5:6). So? **The same faith that saves us, sanctifies us!**

LOVE FULFILLS THE WHOLE LAW

How High is Your "L.Q."? (Love Quotient)

Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." — Matthew 22:34-40



Observations on Matthew 22

The Pharisees were trying to trap Jesus. Had he chosen one of the Ten Commandments as "the greatest," they would have immediately accused him of despising the other nine.

Jesus eluded their trap, but his answer was not merely an escape, but a powerful rebuke of those who pride themselves in "keeping the rules." We must not be content with mere outward obedience to God's law. Jesus calls us to *exceed* the legalistic righteousness of the Pharisees (Matt. 5:20). Paul said that law-focused moralists are "nothing" because they don't love anyone (I Cor. 13).

Think it through: My not killing or stealing from you does not equal loving you. But wonderfully, when we love God and others, we not only fulfill the letter of the law, but the spirit of it as well—and, Jesus said, all the Prophets too!

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples—if you love one another." — **Jesus in John 13:34-35**

In what way is this command "new"?

"LOVE" is the operative word. Consider these five parallel passages in Paul & James:

Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellow man has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbour as yourself." Love does no harm to its neighbour. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. — **Rom. 13:8-10**

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love. — **Gal. 5:6** Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation. — **Gal. 6:15** Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God's commands is what counts. — **1 Cor. 7:19** (Has Paul contradicted himself? If not, why not?)

If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbour as yourself," you are doing right. But if you show favouritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. — **James 2:8-10**

NOTE: It's not fair to try to measure our "L.Q." by how well we think we are loving other people. It must be measured by whether others feel loved by us. How can we know for sure? Be brave. Ask them!

A PERFECT MESS

The grace of God comes to one who was "doing the best she could"

A testimony to grace by Rebecca Morse Long

HI. My name is Becky. I'm a recovering Pharisee, learning to live by grace. So, how did I live before?

Since childhood, I was a Christian, but I lived under law. Everything I did was driven by duty. Now? I still feel the pull to return to the old way, but I have been set free from the slavery to the deep habits that were destroying my joy and fruitfulness for God—self-reliance, living for the praise of people, and an obsession to be righteous in my own strength. Sad to say, these habits came from a heart taught from childhood that the blood of Jesus shed for her on the cross was the only way to be connected to God. But, after one begins with Jesus, how does one keep connected to Him? I was in a complete muddle about that. Jesus said "*Be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect,*" so I put myself on the treadmill of work, work, work, but with no understanding of the strength he offered me.

The reason I didn't understand, was due in part to my upbringing. I am the third of seven children from a Christian pastor's home. My father knew Jesus as his Lord and Savior, but late in his life he admitted that he never learned how to rest as a son in the Father's love. As a result, his life and ministry were driven more by duty and responsibility than by grateful joy. He loved Jesus with all his heart and would often weep over it, but there was a disconnect between that love and obedience.

I love my father very much, and am grateful for the way he taught us the Scriptures. But, because of his model of legalism and drivenness, I am only beginning to learn to live a life of love. My Mum and Dad are in heaven now, and surely rejoicing that their daughter is learning a better way to live.

Our family must have resembled an Old Testament Jewish family. We knew the Law of God and sought to keep it perfectly. But we worked hard to keep it out of our own resources rather than by faith. (Rom.10:2,3). We expected perfect obedience—from ourselves and one another. We were seven children, six girls and one boy, and we all helped with family chores. There was much work to do. We had a large

vegetable garden, and had to keep the house (and ourselves) tidy. Our Mum posted charts to ensure that everyone knew exactly what his or her job was and when it should be done.

Organization is necessary for any family, and I'm glad we were taught personal responsibility from an early age. But we never seemed to move from duty to love. As I think back on it, this is strange because Jesus said *love is the fulfillment of the law*. We, on the other hand, were mired down in Old Testament law, not understanding what Jesus meant by that. This is all the more strange because we had family worship and our daily bread was to read the Scriptures and discuss them.

Our failure to sense that something was terribly wrong is a tribute to the deceptive power of the flesh. We congratulated ourselves that we were obeying the law to the best of our ability, but all the

while, we were failing to live up to what the law really required—love (Rom. 13:8-10). The crux of our problem is in the phrase, "*to the best of our ability.*" I know now that our ability is the enemy of grace (Gal. 3:1-5). Lutheran professor Gerhard Fredie put his finger on it:

"Christianity is not a movement from vice to virtue, but a movement from virtue to grace." Ironic, isn't it, that in striving to establish our virtue, we short-circuited the Gospel's transforming power in our lives.

My father taught us the Scriptures so that we would know God's law and "be responsible for our lives." There was never a double standard. He measured himself against the same high mark he set for us. He drove himself to obey and serve Jesus with his whole heart, but his measuring stick was too short! His measure was perfect *outward* obedience to God's law. When any of us failed, everyone else would become angry. I share this not to excuse myself, but to explain why after I married and had children, I continued to think this was the way of holiness. It seemed normal to me. If I was angry, I felt that other people were to blame. "*After all,*" I reasoned,

“ To fully appropriate the grace of God, one must despair of self rather than depend on it. ”

"they aren't living up to God's standards!" Like my Dad, I often had terrible outbursts of anger. Then I would say to myself, "It's not my fault; if I could just live alone with Jesus, he and I would be perfect." I was sure that any stress in my life was everyone else's fault. Yes, I was a Christian, but I was very judgmental and unforgiving of others. At the same time, I was filled with self-condemnation for my own failures. I wanted to

“ **If I could just live alone with Jesus, he and I would be perfect.** ”

be perfect, and so I was... a perfect mess!

In 1962, while attending a Christian university, I met and fell in love with Johnny Long. We aspired to

be foreign missionaries, and in 1973, after 8 years of marriage and with John Wade Long, III, our 3 year-old in-tow, we set out for the bush of Kenya, East Africa. Our second child, Rebecca Elizabeth was born that year. We had a trying time in Africa, but not because of the place. We had travelled half way round the world to give others the Gospel, but were not mastered by the Gospel ourselves. I cringe to remember how busy we were, striving to do well—to please others and so earn our "ministry righteousness." Some fruit we had there remains, but those years were marred by conflict with our fellow missionaries, and after five years of frustration, we resigned and returned to the USA to re-enter pastoral ministry.

It is a testimony to the power of the Holy Spirit that despite our flesh, Jesus used us to help build His Kingdom in Kenya and the USA, because in our hearts and family there was turmoil, lack of forgiveness, bitterness, anger, fear, and pain. Johnny and I were "doing the best we could," and honestly thought all Christians lived that way. (In fact, most of them we knew did.) As we raised our two older children, we assumed that their outward obedience to God's law was an indication of changed hearts. But, when our son left home for university, the flaws in our self-reliant lifestyle began to show as he acted out his rebellion against God and us. We can see that our legalistic parenting was partly responsible for driving him away from Christ. As Paul said in Romans 7, the law, rather than encouraging holiness, tends to stir up sin. We ruled our home by law, so quite predictably, reaped lawlessness.

Mary Elizabeth ("Libba") was born in 1982.

Five years later, I began listening to a sermon series on Galatians, by Dr. Jack Miller. He was a pastor, professor of practical theology at Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia, and the founder of World Harvest Mission. I would weep as I listened to Jack's words of grace for *Christians*. It

began to dawn on me that there was a better way to live! Several friends and I worked through the Galatians series and prayed for wisdom to apply what we were hearing. Johnny says of that time that he was so proud, self-satisfied, and clueless, he thought the lot of us were balmy.

Then, in 1990, Johnny and I attended a conference called *SONSHIP*. It was a week-long renewal conference for ministry couples, and Jack Miller was the main speaker. That week was the culmination of four years of searching for me, and, for the two of us, the beginning of a deep surrender of our self-reliant lives to Christ.

How did this fresh surrender reshape our lives? My feelings of self-condemnation and the need to criticise others began to give-way to a childlike rest in the Father's love for me. Although I had been a Christian since the age of six, I had not understood that the Father loved me unconditionally because of Jesus. As I "*laid my deadly doing down, down at Jesus' feet*", the gracious Holy Spirit began to work a joyful, loving obedience in me—what Paul calls "*the obedience that comes from faith*" (Rom. 1:5).

I began to live a life of repentance and forgiveness towards myself and others. And I repented—especially to our two older children, begging them to forgive me for the way I had parented them so harshly. I began to relate to them as a fellow sinner who saw her sins and struggles. I repented of living a life of working to be *RIGHT*. Johnny and I had *much* less conflict as we began to relate to one another as two big sinners who needed Jesus every day! Our pretense to perfection went to the rubbish heap where it belonged. Secure in God's love, we began sharing with each other honestly and from the heart. Our home became a place of peace as our growing belief in the Father's love enabled us to extend grace and mercy to one another. Instead of pouncing on one another's weaknesses, we could bear one another's burdens. Still when we do quarrel, we move quickly to forgiveness. We are "safe" for each other. I was and am able to talk to Johnny about my bitterness and the things I had held against him, and he was and is able to *AGREE* with me and ask me to forgive him. *Glory be to the Father!*

My idolatry of living for the praise of others, has largely fallen away. Although I still value the opinions of others, my trust in the Father's love for me is so real, I no longer depend on peoples' praise to make me feel worthy. The Triune God has gradually healed my fear of rejection and enables me to love others freely. This new way of living is ongoing. I have a deepening sense of my utter inability to handle life apart from God's

grace, and when I forget that, I repent and run to Jesus for fresh cleansing. I'm learning to abandon my attempts to produce a righteousness of my own and rest in the righteousness Christ provides (Phil.3:7-11). Faith in Jesus changes me even when it's weak because it unites me to the Mighty Christ! As Johnny says, "I'm still a big mess, I just repent a lot".

The Holy Spirit is so gentle. He is patiently teaching me how to live on a repentance/faith basis rather than on a success/fail basis. What a difference to live one's life "in the atmosphere of the Gospel". Yes, we have our ups and downs, but there is a new vibrancy in our daily communion with the Father, and a profound sense of the reality of Jesus' intercession for us before God's Throne (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25). We're learning to admit our weaknesses, and live as dependent children on the Holy Spirit for the power to live and do ministry. What a relief!!

In 1993, Johnny and I returned to Africa, to write and teach *SONSHIP for Africa*. In 2005, we moved here to London as "empty nesters" and hope to spend the rest of our lives in the specialised ministry of "teaching the Gospel to Christians"! This was what we needed for so long, and we've discovered the need is universal. Our chief tool for this ministry is the *Grace4Life* course, though Johnny also teaches courses in grace-centred preaching. Like *SONSHIP for Africa* before it, *Grace4Life* is nothing more or less than the Gospel applied to the daily life of the believer. We like to joke that no one ever graduates from our course because it is impossible to outgrow our need for Jesus.

I failed so miserably for so long, from now on, I want my life to be a "window of grace" through which others can see the love of Jesus. If my story has struck a chord in you, and you'd like to know more, please contact us. Perhaps we can study together and learn how to walk by faith. God wants us to live like the loved daughters and sons we are. Our "Abba" is the King of the Universe. He



is ready to lead us into a new life in which we can resist the pull to think, live and act like lonely, self-reliant orphans.

In our Father's strong love,

Becky

Rebecca Morse Long

Post Script

Countless "how to" books have been written about the Christian life, but there's one I consider the best because it is doctrinally sound *and* painfully honest. You will find no "Three Easy Steps to Holiness" here, just the true story of one woman's painful struggle to learn to live by grace.

The author is Rose Marie Miller—wife of the late Jack Miller whom I've mentioned. The battles in Rose Marie's life are eerily parallel to mine. Both of us tried to please God and others in our own strength. Perhaps you're caught up in the same of struggle. If so, I highly recommend: *From Fear to Freedom - Living as Sons and Daughters of God*.¹

How good is this book? Jerry Bridges, best-selling author and longtime member of the Navigators says: "*From Fear to Freedom* is a powerful and captivating book. By freely opening her own life to us, Rose Marie Miller allows the Holy Spirit to probe deeply into ours. This book is 'must reading' for those who want to live daily in the freedom and joy of God's grace."

Dr. Dan Allender, Christian psychologist and author of *Bold Love, The Wounded Heart* and other titles has this to say:

"*This book invites the soul to a celebration—a party. It sings of grace and offers a vision of hope we have lost in our day. No age is more in need of the radical call to live as sons and daughters of God. We strive endlessly; we are exhausted, depleted, and lonely. Is this the abundant life? What is the problem? Few have the courage of Rose Marie Miller to say it simply and forthrightly—the problem is self-righteousness. Rose Marie offers us a profoundly personal and painful glimpse into her story, exposes the dark corners of our self-righteousness, and invites us to dance with God. Get ready to party.*"



¹ Harold Shaw Publishers, Wheaton, IL, 1994.
Interested? See: <https://www.whm.org/store/>

MY NOTES