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THE MARK OF GRACE

KEY PASSAGE: *By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.*

(Matthew 7:16–17)

WISE WORDS

The soul has life communicated to it, so as through Christ's power to have inherent in itself a vital nature. In the soul where Christ savingly is, there he lives. He does not merely live without it, so as violently to actuate it, but he lives in it, so that the soul also is alive. Grace in the soul is as much from Christ as the light in a glass, held out in the sunbeams, is from the sun.

JONATHAN EDWARDS

God's free gift of justification, that is, pardon and acceptance here and now through Christ's perfect obedience culminating in his substitutionary sin bearing for us on the cross, is the basis on which the entire sanctifying process rests. . . . Holy people glory, not in their holiness, but in Christ's cross; for the holiest saint is never more than a justified sinner and never sees himself in any other way.

J. I. PACKER

THOUGHT STARTER

Has there ever been a time when you recognized that someone was a follower of Christ before they told you of their faith? What did you see in them that led you to conclude that they were a Christian? _____

Can you think of a time when you were surprised to find that someone was a Christian? What was it about them that made you surprised to learn of their faith? _____

Describe an occasion when someone recognized your commitment to Jesus Christ without your having to tell the person. _____

SCRIPTURE STUDY

The life of discipleship is rooted in the grace of God. It begins in grace, is lived out in grace, and will be completed in grace. Discipleship is not so much a matter of doing the right things as it is one of cooperating with the grace of God. Everything we do as followers of Christ is a reflection of the life of Christ within us. Notice what the verses below have to say about the relationship between God’s grace and the Christian life.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. John testifies concerning him. He cries out, saying, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.’” From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. (John 1:14–17)

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. (Ephesians 2:8–9)

What do these verses teach about the origin of grace? _____

What do they say about the relationship between grace and faith? _____

Grace is the foundation of the Christian life. There is no salvation apart from grace. Why is grace so important?

How does God’s grace affect those who receive it? _____

What do the following verses, all from the book of Acts, teach about the source, recipients, and effects of God’s grace?

	Source of Grace	Recipients	Effects of Grace
Acts 4:31–37	_____	_____	_____
Acts 6:8	_____	_____	_____
Acts 11:19–23	_____	_____	_____
Acts 14:3	_____	_____	_____

	Source of Grace	Recipients	Effects of Grace
Acts 14:26	_____	_____	_____
Acts 15:11	_____	_____	_____
Acts 15:40	_____	_____	_____
Acts 18:27	_____	_____	_____
Acts 20:24	_____	_____	_____
Acts 20:32	_____	_____	_____

In Matthew 7:16–17, Jesus says that it is possible to recognize a false prophet by the spiritual fruit that is produced in his or her life. In what way is this also true of a disciple? _____

MY RESPONSE

1. *Describe the time when you recognized your need for God’s grace and the forgiveness of Christ.* _____

2. *Think of someone who has not heard your story. Pray that God will give you an opportunity to share it with him or her in the next week.* _____

CONCLUSION

Discipleship is not primarily a matter of what we do. It is an outgrowth of who and what we are in Christ. Yet if this is true, it is reasonable for others to expect to see proof of the reality of our commitment to Christ reflected in the way that we live. Jesus’ observation regarding false prophets is also true of disciples. They are recognizable by the fruit they produce: “By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit” (Matthew 7:16–17). So what are the marks of a disciple? Jesus Himself identified several important characteristics; we’ll look at them in upcoming lessons.

PRAYER

Write a prayer of response. If you have not trusted in Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord, ask Him to forgive you of your sin and to take control of your life. If you have already done so, thank God for His grace and ask Him to use this workbook to strengthen your spiritual life.

THE MARK OF BAPTISM

KEY PASSAGE: *Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”*
(Matthew 28:18–20)

WISE WORDS

But baptism serves as our confession before men. Indeed, it is the mark by which we publicly profess that we wish to be reckoned God’s people; by which we testify that we agree in worshipping the same God, in one religion with all Christians; by which finally we openly affirm our faith.

JOHN CALVIN

Experiencing baptism doesn’t make you right with God. The water of baptism does not wash away the guilt of your disobedience to the laws of God. Rather it is the grace of God, through the work of Jesus Christ that brings you into God’s family and favor. That doesn’t mean, however, that baptism is unimportant. Although baptism is never equated with faith or salvation in the New Testament, it is closely associated with both.

DONALD WHITNEY

THOUGHT STARTER

Have you been baptized? Why or why not? _____

What would you say to someone who said that they had trusted in Christ for salvation but did not want to be baptized? _____

SCRIPTURE STUDY

The first mark of a disciple is baptism. It is one of the first acts that identifies us as followers of Jesus Christ and initiates us into a life of obedience. When Jesus commissioned the church to go and make disciples of all nations, He identified baptism as the first of the two central tasks of disciple making in Matthew 28:19.

Read Matthew 28:18–20 and then answer the following questions.

With what does Jesus associate baptism in Matthew 28:18–20? _____

Who is to be baptized? _____

What is the significance of baptizing “in the name” of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? _____

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. (Romans 6:1–4)

Baptism is a rite with both individual and corporate significance. What do these verses tell us about what baptism symbolizes for the individual? _____

Water baptism signifies the believer's spiritual union with Christ. How does this help you to understand Paul's meaning when he says that believers have been “baptized” into Christ's death? _____

According to Paul, what practical implications does this have for daily living? _____

Where does Paul say the power to live this new life comes from? _____

For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. (1 Corinthians 12:13)

Water baptism also indicates that the believer has been joined to the larger fellowship of the church. What does Paul say that believers have in common with everyone else who has trusted in Christ, according to 1 Corinthians 12:13? _____

What implications does this have for the way you view other believers? _____

Those who are joined to Christ by faith are also joined to other believers in the fellowship of the Spirit, Paul tells the Corinthians—and us. They confess the same Lord and are indwelt by the same Spirit. In a sense, baptism is as much a symbol of commitment to the church as it is a pledge of fidelity to Christ.

[Christ] was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him. (1 Peter 3:18–22)

To what Old Testament event does Peter compare the waters of baptism? _____

What do you think Peter means when he says that the waters of Noah “symbolize” baptism? What do the two events seem to have in common? _____

The text does not say that Noah was saved “from” water but “through” it. Noah and his family passed through the waters of judgment but were spared its effects because Noah had believed God and had entered the safety of the ark. In a similar way, believers passed through divine judgment when it was poured out on Christ. They have been spared its effects because they have believed the gospel and are safe “in Christ.”

In what sense does Peter say baptism “saves”? Is it the ritual itself? _____

The Bible does not teach that the rite of baptism in and of itself conveys the forgiveness of sin. Although Peter says that baptism “now saves you,” he clarifies that it is actually the work of Christ that does the saving

and not the water of baptism (1 Peter 3:21).

Peter uses the language of contractual agreements to describe baptism. The Greek term that is translated “pledge” literally meant “answer” and referred to a legal procedure in which questions were asked and commitments made on the part of those who entered into a contractual arrangement with one another. Baptism is a pledge of commitment made to God that springs from the cleansing that has come through faith in Christ.

In what sense might it also be said that God is making a pledge in baptism? _____

With what is baptism linked in the following verses?

Acts 2:38; 22:16 _____

Romans 6:4; Colossians 2:11–12 _____

What changes can you point to as evidence of the new life God has promised to those who are in Christ? _____

Read Galatians 5:17–24 and Ephesians 2:1–10. In the boxes below write what these passages say was true of us while we were in the sinful nature and what is true of us now that we are in Christ.

Old Self	New Self

MY RESPONSE

The ordinance of baptism has been compared to one's wedding vows. Write out a "pledge" of commitment to Christ that reflects the spiritual truths symbolized in baptism.

CONCLUSION

Because it symbolizes the believer's union with Christ through the Holy Spirit, baptism also contains an implicit promise of transformation. Baptism's picture of burial and resurrection points to a radical change in the believer's nature. Those who are in Christ are alive in a way that was not true prior to Christ. Paul links baptism with the Old Testament rite of circumcision and says that those who have been baptized have "put off" the old nature (Colossians 2:11–12). All who enter into a relationship with Christ die to the old self. Positively, they have been "clothed" with Christ (Galatians 3:27). God's promise in baptism is the promise of forgiveness and a new life. My commitment in baptism is the pledge to live in accordance with the change that Christ has brought about in me by His death and resurrection.

PRAYER

Use what you have written above as the basis for a prayer of commitment to Christ.

THE MARK OF OBEDIENCE

KEY PASSAGE: *To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”*
(John 8:31–32)

WISE WORDS

A little thing is a little thing, but faithfulness in little things is a very great thing.

AMY CARMICHAEL

Our Lord never enforces obedience; He does not take means to make me do what He wants. At certain times I wish God would master me and make me do the thing, but He will not; in other moods I wish He would leave me alone, but He does not.

A. W. TOZER

THOUGHT STARTER

Think of a time when, even though you found it difficult, you chose to obey Christ. What made the decision to obey so difficult? _____

Why did you choose to obey rather than disobey? _____

The Bible tells us that we are saved by grace and not by our own effort (Ephesians 2:8). Why should we be concerned about obedience since it is not the cause of our salvation? _____

SCRIPTURE STUDY

True discipleship is marked by obedience. The second major component of Jesus’ directive in the Great Commission was to teach disciples “to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:20). Obedience is not optional for the Christian. As Jesus’ popularity increased, He warned followers that obedience would be the true test of their discipleship. According to John 8:31–32, “To the Jews who had believed him,

Jesus said, ‘If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.’” Passages like this can make us uncomfortable because they seem to imply that our status as disciples is earned. There is a condition here, but its force is one of evidence rather than of cause. Jesus did not say that we become disciples by holding to His teaching.

Read John 8:31–32 again. Which comes first in these verses, discipleship or obedience? _____

What difference does this make? _____

Commenting on the passage, New Testament scholar Leon Morris explained, “Jesus’ words then are meant to drive home to formal and casual adherents something of the meaning of true discipleship. If men in any sense believe in Him it is important that they be led to see what real faith means.”¹ The obedience spoken of by Jesus is proof that those who obey are truly Christ’s disciples in the first place. This may sound like a semantic game, but the order is vitally important. If discipleship depends upon my obedience, then the primary focus of Jesus’ statement is on my ability to comply with all that God commands. If, on the other hand, obedience depends upon the reality of my discipleship relationship with Jesus Christ, the primary focus is on Christ Himself.

The Scriptures speak of two very different kinds of obedience: one is legalistic; the other is rooted in grace. Legalistic obedience follows God’s commands in order to earn a righteous standing in God’s sight. Grace-rooted obedience recognizes that righteousness can only be received as a gift. It cannot be earned as a wage. My obedience is an expression of gratitude for that gift.

After each of the following Scripture passages, indicate the type of obedience being described and briefly explain why you think it falls into that category.

Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law, but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified. (Galatians 2:16 NASB)

Is Galatians 2:16 describing legalistic or grace-based obedience? Why? _____

I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? (Galatians 3:2–3)

Is Galatians 3:2–3 describing legalistic or grace-based obedience? Why? _____

Consider Abraham: “He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.” So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. (Galatians 3:6–9)

Is Galatians 3:6–9 describing legalistic or grace-based obedience? Why? _____

Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. (Galatians 5:3–4)

Is Galatians 5:3–4 describing legalistic or grace-based obedience? Why? _____

How does legalistic obedience differ from grace-rooted obedience? _____

Legalistic obedience is the polar opposite of grace-rooted obedience. Although the objective in legalistic obedience may seem like a good one—the observance of God’s commands—it is flawed because it overestimates the human capacity to comply. It produces an obedience that is grounded in self rather than in God.

What do the following passages indicate is the difference with grace-based obedience?

John 14:15 _____

John 14:24 _____

Romans 1:5 _____

Grace, like legalism, also has obedience to God’s commands as its objective. According to Romans 2:14, it is not those who hear God’s Law who are declared righteous but those who obey it. The chief difference with grace-rooted obedience is that it is grounded in Christ’s righteousness rather than my own. It is “the obedience that comes from faith” (Romans 1:5). Legalism, on the other hand, produces an obedience that is

grounded in self rather than in God.

What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "Do not covet." But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. For apart from law, sin is dead. Once I was alive apart from law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death. So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good. Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! But in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it produced death in me through what was good, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful. We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. (Romans 7:7–14)

If God's Law is "holy, righteous and good," why can't we depend upon it to make us righteous before God? _____

What does Paul say was God's purpose in giving the Law? _____

What does the Law teach us about the nature of sin? _____

What does the Law teach us about ourselves? _____

What does it teach us about Christ? _____

MY RESPONSE

1. Identify an example of grace-rooted obedience from the past week. _____

2. In what way did it require the grace of God? _____

3. Identify a specific area where you know you will need to obey God in the near future. _____

4. What kind of grace is needed in order for you to comply? _____

5. What plans have you made to obey? _____

CONCLUSION

For the Christian, faith *is* obedience, because it focuses on the one who obeyed all God's commands on my behalf. When I trusted in Jesus Christ, my faith was credited to me as righteousness (Romans 4:5). Grace-rooted obedience recognizes that righteousness can only be received as a gift. It cannot be earned as a wage. My present obedience is an expression of gratitude for that gift. It is not surprising, then, that Jesus repeatedly identified love as the primary motive for obedience. "If you love me," He told His disciples, "you will obey what I command" (John 14:15). "He who does not love me," He warned, "will not obey my teaching" (John 14:24).

PRAYER

Write a brief prayer asking for God's help to follow through on the area of obedience described above.

THE
MARK OF
SPIRITUAL FRUIT

KEY PASSAGE: *If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.*
(John 15:7–8)

WISE WORDS

Every plant must have both soil and root. Without both of these there can be no life, no growth, no fruit.

HORATIUS BONAR

Samuel Coleridge, the British poet and philosopher, was arguing with a man who believed that religious instruction was harmful to children. The man believed that children should not be burdened with their parents' notions about God. He reasoned that this would make them better equipped to make their own decisions about faith when they reached the age of discretion. Coleridge strongly disagreed but did not argue with the man. Instead, he invited him to step into his garden. It had been neglected for some time and was overgrown with weeds. "Do you call this a garden!" the man declared. "There are nothing but weeds here!" Coleridge smiled slyly upon hearing the man's criticism. "Well, you see," Coleridge explained, "I did not wish to infringe upon the liberty of the garden in any way. I was just giving the garden a chance to express itself and to choose its own production."

THOUGHT STARTER

How is the believer's spiritual life like a garden? _____

What kind of "soil" is necessary before we can produce spiritual fruit? _____

Should you be concerned if you do not see in your life any evidence of spiritual fruit? Why or why not?

SCRIPTURE STUDY

According to Jesus, those who abide in Christ produce spiritual fruit (John 15:5). Results are expected of the disciple, but they are the results of being connected to the vine. It is the life of the vine that generates the fruit. Yet there is clearly an element of personal responsibility involved in the fruit-bearing process: The believer has the responsibility of abiding. Still, it is not possible to produce fruit apart from Christ. When I abide, I am conscious that everything that Christ commands of me Christ must also produce in me. It is a state that might be described as “actively passive.” It is both active and passive at the same time.

Read John 15:1–17 and in the table below summarize what is said about the Father, Jesus Christ, and the believer in these verses.

Verse	The Father	Jesus Christ	The Believer
v. 1	The Father is the gardener.	Jesus is the vine.	
v. 2	The Father does the pruning.		Branches that bear fruit are pruned.
v. 3			
v. 4			
v. 5			
v. 6			
v. 7			
v. 8			
v. 9			
v. 10			
v. 11			
v. 12			
v. 13			
v. 14			
v. 15			
v. 16			
v. 17			

What does Jesus say is the secret to a life of spiritual fruitfulness in these verses? _____

How would you describe the relationship between the branch and the vine in Jesus’ metaphor? _____

What is being stressed here, the action of bearing fruit or the life-giving nature of the vine? What is the relationship between these two? _____

How do the Bible and prayer play a part in the fruit bearing process, according to Jesus? _____

What is Jesus saying about the life of discipleship besides, "Read the Scriptures and pray"? _____

MY RESPONSE

1. In what ways are you currently "abiding" in Christ? _____

2. What evidence is there that you are bearing "much fruit" for Christ? _____

3. Identify at least one area where you would like Christ to produce even more fruit. _____

CONCLUSION

According to Jesus, the branch draws its life from its connection to the vine. If it were to be severed from the vine, it would wither and die. The same is true of the believer. We have no spiritual life apart from Christ. He is the source of our life and the ultimate cause of fruitfulness. The Christian life is simply the life of Christ reflected in our own lives. It has both passive and active dimensions. It is passive in that Christ alone is its source. I cannot give life to myself. No human effort can add to what Christ has already done. Yet there is also an active dimension to the spiritual life. We make choices and take actions that enable us to access the life of Christ and bring it to bear on daily living. We read the Bible and pray. We worship God and serve one another. In the natural realm, the farmer plants the seed and cultivates the crop but cannot make the plant grow. This is also true in the spiritual realm. Human effort is involved but the growth comes from God. As Paul puts it, "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow" (1 Corinthians 3:6).

PRAYER

Write a prayer asking God to produce spiritual fruit in the area identified above. Be specific in what you request.

THE
MARK OF
LOVE

KEY PASSAGE: *“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.”*
(John 13:34–35)

WISE WORDS

Love is the abridgement of all theology.

FRANCIS DESALES

The worldly man treats certain people kindly because he “likes” them: the Christian, trying to treat everyone kindly, finds himself liking more and more people as he goes on—including people he could not even have imagined himself liking at the beginning.

C. S. LEWIS

THOUGHT STARTER

Who are we commanded to love? _____

Do we have a special obligation to love some more than others? Why or why not? _____

Think of someone who has shown love to you recently. How did he or she show it? _____

SCRIPTURE STUDY

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” “What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?” He answered: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind”; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.” But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:25–29)

Who, according to Jesus, has first claim on our love? _____

Who are we to love in addition? _____

Why is the order of these commands important? _____

What question did this religious expert ask after Jesus told him that he had answered the question correctly?

What motivated his second question? _____

Jesus answered his question by telling a story about a man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho. Read it in Luke 10:29–37. Then answer the following questions.

Why do you suppose the priest and Levite passed by without helping the man? _____

What “good” reasons might they have had for their actions? (cf. Leviticus 21:10–11; Numbers 5:2; 19:13)?

What “good” reasons might the Samaritan have had for passing by (cf. John 4:9, 20)? _____

In what sense was the Samaritan a neighbor? _____

What does this parable tell you about the kind of love Christ expects from those who are His disciples?

We love him because he first loved us. (1 John 4:19 KJV)

Lovers often adopt the same interests; it’s one of the characteristics of love. People who have been married for a long time often begin to talk like one another. Some even begin to resemble each other physically. The same principle holds true in our relationship with God. If we love God, we will want to be like Him. We will love what God loves. This would be easy if those whom God loves were always lovable. Fortunately, He has a penchant for loving the unlovely and for setting His affection on those who don’t love Him back. We shouldn’t be surprised. This was our own experience. We love Him because He first loved us.

In what ways does love differ from a “mood”? _____

What implications does this have as far as your response to Christ’s command is concerned? _____

How does this help you to obey Christ’s command to love others? _____

What does John say about the relationship between love and action in 1 John 3:17–20? _____

MY RESPONSE

1. Rewrite Jesus’ command in John 13:34–35. In the place of the phrase “one another” write the name of someone Christ is calling you to show love to today. _____

2. *Think of at least one practical way that you can show love to the person you have identified on page 26.*

CONCLUSION

Our obligation to love as Christ loves is challenged by today's confused notions about the nature of love. True, biblical love is active. It is reflected more in what we do than in how we feel. Today's society views love primarily as an emotion. Although emotion plays a part, its role is secondary. Moods change from day to day. I can feel affectionate toward someone today and cold toward the same person tomorrow. Love involves an exercise of the will. Biblical love isn't necessarily feeling good about another person. It is acting towards them in a way that is pleasing to God and appropriate to their need.

PRAYER

Pray for the person you have identified above. Pray for yourself that God will make you a channel of love to that person.

NOTE

1. Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 455.