***Seven Distinctions of the Age of Grace  
  
Colossians 1:25-29  
  
COL-206***

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Our subject is "The Mystery of the Church," segment number 21.

The dispensation of the church began on the day of Pentecost, and has now run almost 2000 years, and for many obvious reasons, we suspect it's nearing its end. At the close of the Church age, a distinct and unique body of believers in God's plan of the ages will be removed from the earth in the rapture event. Christians today are all in full-time service to the Lord Jesus Christ. That is a simple statement. It is a fact of life, but how hard it is for Christians to learn that. How hard it is for Christians to understand that they are not their own. They've been bought with a price, the death of Christ, and their call is to a mission which they, and they alone, can fulfill. We are all in full-time Christian service. We have gathered this morning for the explicit purpose of orienting ourselves, and training ourselves to perform that military duty.

Satan and his demons are constantly on the prowl, attacking the Christian who is positive to doctrine, and moving into spiritual maturity. Such Christians are producing divine good works, and thus they're building up the body of Christ. Such Christians have works which will bring about the final defeat of Satan in time. Satan and his role as an angel of light is easily, however, deceiving many today, who expect to see him only as an angel of darkness. So, the glamor and the attractiveness of the world are brought before us by Satan, and it's very easy for Christians to be tripped up. To cope with such a person, and such a demonic force, God has provided the believers in the church age with a unique series of resources. Never in any previous dispensation have believers had the capacity to live their lives in a magnificent expression of godliness, and to be able to beat the devil at every turn of the road.

**The Inner Circle**

However, to do that, Christians must guard against indifference to the Word. This is an occupational hazard in the Christian life. Christians think that they have already read the Bible, and they have heard these things, so they do not need to feed upon the Word of God again, and again, and again, on a regular basis. That is foolishness. The Christian must avoid the carnality status. Anytime you have stepped out of the will and the law of God, you have entered into the realm of carnality. At the point of salvation, we all come into an inner circle in which we are controlled by God the Holy Spirit. This is what we refer to as a spiritual Christian, and this is referred to in the Bible as being "filled with the Spirit."

**The Outer Circle**

We come into an outer circle at the same time, which is eternal fellowship with God on the basis of faith in Jesus Christ alone. This outer circle can never be left again. Once you are into the family of God, you cannot be unborn again spiritually. However, in this inner circle of walking with God, and under His blessing, you can step out. You step out through sin; you step out through human good works; and you step into the outer circle, which the Bible calls carnality. Here you are controlled by the old sin nature, and here you can be as much of a pig and a beast as any unbeliever. And once you are out of this inner circle of temporal blessing, nothing goes right. Everything comes down. And there's nothing but injury all around.

**Maintain your Temporal Fellowship**

So, it is important to understand how to be saved, but it is equally important to understand how to maintain your temporal fellowship in your daily experience. 1 John 1:9 is the answer to that: "When we confess our sins, He (the Father) is faithful". He'll do it every time. "And just" – He does it on the basis that he paid for your sin. "To forgive us our sins" – not for Salvation, but for fellowship: "And to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" This includes all those things that we've done wrong that we're not even aware of.

So, this is the issue: living in a place of God's blessing. To be in the outer circle is to be carnal. To be in the inner circle is to be spiritual. This is a deadly territory. This is a deadly area – to be in carnality. You are easily exposed to being made a spiritual casualty by Satan. The only security is within the enclave (within the protective custody) of God the Holy Spirit in that inner circle of spiritual fellowship with Him.

This Christian must also be aware of permitting emotion to control his soul. You don't decide truth on how you feel about something. You don't decide what you should do with your life on how you feel about what you should do. This is a favorite expression of the Mormons. They conclude truth on a phrase they have called "a burning in their bosom." And they beat themselves on the chest and say, "When I have this burning in my bosom, I know that I have the truth of God." And Satan says, "Amen. And let me burn your bosom a little bit, and I'll give you the things that you think are truth, but which are my falsehoods. You have to live objectively on the basis of the truth of Scripture. And you never end up getting enough of that objective instruction.

**Reversionism**

A Christians must also be on guard against reversionism. The little sin progresses to the bigger sin. It all starts off with a small degree of variance, and pretty soon you're far afield. And what begins as a break in fellowship becomes a landslide into reversionism. And you are right back down to where everything is crushed – a disaster all around you. That is a very dangerous condition. And any Christian who persists in staying in reversionism, and refusing to come back out by ceasing and desisting, and making a confession, he is now exposed to what the Bible calls "the sin unto death." At a certain point God, says, "Okay, come on home to heaven, Christian. There's no point in your staying on earth any longer."

The Christian must also maintain the level of his spiritual maturity structure which he has built in his soul through the intake of doctrine. What you learn of doctrinal principles is stored, as the Scriptures indicate, in your human spirit. That's what the Spirit of God uses to guide you. And when that spiritual maturity structure is at what James calls "super-abounding grace), you're at the prime of your spiritual life. That's the only way to go. So, everything in life, you take in stride. And life makes sense. And most of all, you're never going to stand at the Judgment Seat of Christ and find that you wasted your life.

Now, what Christians often do there is when they hear truth they don't like, they flee it, without reasonably considering that maybe they're wrong, and the truth they've heard is what is right.

**The Church Age**

Now all of this is possible in the Church age. It was never possible in the age of Israel. It was never possible in previous generations. They didn't have this kind of special connection with God. But by the same token, never has the doctrinal principle enunciated in Galatians 6:7-9 been truer than in the dispensation of the church today: "Do not be deceived. God is not mocked. For whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh (his old sin nature) shall from the flesh reap corruption. But the one who sows to the Spirit (the Spirit of God), shall from the Spirit reap eternal life." And eternal life means that, on the one hand, sowing to the flesh, you reap destruction; but, sowing to the Spirit of God, you reap things that are forever. "And let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary."

**The Justice of God**

The justice of God is what every dispensation is about. The satanic host says that God is not fair. Every dispensation shows that God blesses those who obey Him, and He does not bless those who disobey Him. He is fair either way.

So, the justice of God is never more forcefully demonstrated than in the Church age with its magnificent grace assets and opportunities, which enable a believer to "do right". A Jew could never really do right. It was all dependent on his will and his ability. But in the Church age, all of that human restriction is overridden. *You can do right.* You can imitate Christ, and please God the Father with godliness and good works.

**Sowing what you Reap**

The Christian who lives by the lust patterns of the old sin nature receives a rotten life. Now, that's fair, and that's justice. And he has loss of eternal rewards in heaven. That's fair. That's justice. The Christian who lives by the principles of doctrine, and in fellowship with the Holy Spirit, receives a life of great happiness and prosperity now, and an abundance of eternal rewards in heaven. That's fair, and that's justice. The one in life is a loser. He's bent on self-destruction. The other in life is a winner, and he is bent on divine enrichment. That's fair, that's justice.

This law of sowing and reaping (you well know) is immutable. It's immutable in nature. You'll not sow onions and get carrots. What you so is what you will reap. That is a simple statement, but so easily passed over.

So, the apostle Paul says, "Do not be deceived. The devil is always trying to con you about this – that you can get away with breaking the rules of God, and that you will not lose your way and get disoriented. It just takes a little first step off.

The first time I had to fly a triple-leg, cross-country trip for my private pilot's license, I did all right on the first two. And then on the third leg, which was a long leg, I suddenly realized that what I was looking at on the ground (my orientation points and fixes) were not on my chart. I was lost. And I later discovered that there was a deviation in my navigational equipment that led me off a little bit. But the farther I went, the farther I was off. And suddenly, I'm up there looking at my gas gauge, and looking down below for some nice farmer's field to pull into, and having no idea where I was. I was supposed to be at Corsicana. And suddenly, down below me is a military airfield.

I was in a little two-place plane with no radio. So. I watched the planes coming in to see which direction they were coming in, so I'd know which direction from which the wind was blowing, since I couldn't tell without some smoke or something. And after I saw the runway was cleared, I swung in behind, and came down and made a landing on that runway.

Suddenly, a jeep appeared. It had a big sign on it. The Jeep swung around, and I could see that the sign said, "Follow me." So, I did. And I putted around after him, and he pulled me off the main runway onto the side, up at the operations building, and took me inside. And I said, "I'm a student pilot on a cross-country test for my license, and I've gotten off course, and I'm not sure where I am." They said, "Well, you're at Waco." Oh, that's why I couldn't find it on my map. I had flown off the chart.

So, they called up to the tower, and they said, "Did you see this little piper cub come in?" The said, "No." And the guy who brought me is said, "You didn't even see him come in." And they said, "No." So, he chewed him out, and said, "Well, he's down here. He's going to take off."

So they asked me, "Do you need any gas?" I said, "No, I know where I am. I'll hop over to Waco, and I'll gas up there." And so they said, "Okay, we have a bomber taking off. You get in front of him." All I needed was half the runway, because if I'd gone after him it, it would have been happy go-go time.

So anyhow, I got off, and got over to Waco, and gassed up and got home. And the next time I got it all right, and finally got the license. It took just being a little bit off. It could have been disastrous – a little bit off, but the grace of God put it all together. You never can assume that one small thing is irrelevant in the integrity of the Christian life any more than the integrity of the instruments by which you fly.

So do not be deceived. That's the line. God is not mocked. There is a very interesting Greek word here: "muktérizó" (mook-tay-rid'-zo) here. It means that God is not snubbed. Literally in the Greek, it means you do not turn your nose up at God. We, in colloquial language, say, "You don't thumb your nose at God." Don't be fooled. Don't kid yourself. You're not going to thumb your nose at God. For whatever a person sows, this you're going to reap. Any sinning Christian who thinks he can thumb his nose at God, and his moral laws, with impunity is kidding himself. The devil has deceived you. Every Christian decides what his harvest will be by the lifestyle that he chooses to live.

So, the question is, "Do you sow to your sin nature?" It'll be a rotten life. And it'll be corrupt things. If you sow to the things of the Spirit of God, based on the Word of God, it'll be a great life, and it'll be an eternal blessing. And you must choose what your life harvest will be.

At the same time, you must never lose heart over the fact that, by doing right, others may not join you. You do what is right before God, and you stand alone if necessary.

So, Paul very wisely adds, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Galatians 6:9, which says, "Don't lose heart. Keep doing the good thing." That's the first thing that Christians do when things go bad spiritually. They just want to leave the battle: "For in due time, we shall reap, if we do not grow weary." You will win. You cannot lose in the Christian life. And you'll win here on earth to the extent of your devotion and continuance in the battle, and you'll most certainly win at the Judgment Seat of Christ in heaven. You will be rewarded. To give up and quit is to insult God our Father, Who has promised to honor the faithful servant and steward.

Now, the dispensation of the church provides so many unique benefits and powers and blessings to believers, that such access to God through Scripture, that much more is required of us than of any believers in previous generations. And that's why I stress the importance of understanding how this dispensation works, and what is expected of you because of the availability of capacities to live a magnificent spiritual life.

Luke 12:47-48 point this out. For Jesus says. "And that slave knew his master's will, and did not get ready to act in accord with his will, shall receive many lashes. But the one who did not know it, and committed deeds worthy of a flogging, will receive but few. And from everyone who has been given much, shall much be required. And to whom they entrusted much, of him, they will ask the more."

Now, the Christian who is irrelevant in the work of God is not going to have any trouble with the devil. But the Christian who's very relevant to the work of God and to the service of God, providing the funds; providing the spiritual gifts necessary; and, providing the dedication of duty with the great gift of ministry, that is the one that the devil is interested in. And you are the people that are going to have to be on your guard because all of the demonic hosts, I guarantee you, is aware of those of you who are faithful stewards of the living God.

Believers with the knowledge of church-age doctrine will have to answer to God for their lack of positive volition to all of the potential assets they had to work with. It is fair to expect infinitely more, spiritually, of the one who has been well-taught the mind of God.

In Galatians 5:13-16, the apostle Paul says, "For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh (for the sin nature to turn freedom into license), but through love, serve one another. For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, 'you shall love your neighbor as yourself.' But if you bite and devour one another, take care, lest you be consumed by one another. But I say: walk by means of the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desires of the flesh" – the sin nature. It's just that simple.

In John 14:15, Jesus says, "If you love Me, you'll keep My commandments." The principle of this is that if you do not know the commandments of doctrinal principles. If you are incapable of loving God because you're off-base, out of the inner circle of temporal fellowship, or because you are ignorant of doctrinal principles. You'll not be able to love anyone else. You'll have an emotional attachment, but you'll not have the mental-attitude, agape type of love possessing your soul and conducting your life. If that kind of mental-attitude love is there, that is self-sacrificial, and lack of any ill-will, and desires the best for others, with eyes on the Lord, and eyes on the needs of others, then you have fulfilled everything that the Old Testament Law ever asked a person to do. If you cannot love God, you will not love your neighbor, and you'll, therefore, be walking by means of the old sin nature instead of the Holy Spirit.

Now, I happen to know what I'm talking about because I have been your age, and I don't know if any of you have ever been mine. I got my 70 allotted years. And when I arrived there, I was, interestingly enough, in the city of Chicago where I started the countdown on a Sunday morning. And then God says that, after 70, you're on borrowed time. And you go from year-to-year, and so far I've had seven more. Now I have three more years to get ready like Moses, to get to be 80, when I can start my life's work. So, all of that is piling up on me, and all of that is preoccupying a lot of demanding effort. But the fulfillment of a life is all focused upon the Word of God, so that mental attitude love can possess the soul which makes everything good: physically; emotionally; spiritually; and, socially. And all of this is simply by means based upon walking by means of the Holy Spirit.

So, those of you who are born in the age of grace, and have all these spiritual opportunities that no one in other ages has had, more is going to be required of you. And rightly, God the Father is going to anticipate that you should be more productive, and you should be true blue. And when you aren't, it's a disaster.

Now, because I have been the age I am, I have had the experience of seeing the disasters. I could call a roll call of people who went from princes of God, and suddenly collapsed, because the mistake was made that they had it made. They don't have to come to church. They don't have to pay attention to Scripture. They don't have to deal with personal sin when it's only beginning before you get far afield, and way off your course. It's a dangerous game, and the Bible is very explicit. 1 Corinthians 10:12: "Let him that thinks he stands, take heed, lest he fall." And if you don't take care that you stand in spiritual integrity, I guarantee you, you will fall.

Therefore, I caution you to remember 1 Peter 5:8: "Be sober of spirit. Be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour." Let it not be you.

Now the unique features of the Church dispensation contrast it with all previous ages. We've looked at four of these distinctive features that are ours, and ours alone, as Christians.

1. **Positional Truth**

The first one was positional truth. Every believer, at the point of salvation, is baptized by the Holy Spirit unto the Lord Jesus Christ, so that he becomes a child of the royal family of God forever. That is positional truth. Everything that Christ is, at that moment, you become, in the eyes of God the Father.

1. **The Indwelling of Christ**

Next is the distinct feature of the universal indwelling of Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ indwells every Christian for personal fellowship, and for sharing all of the riches that are possessed by the Son of God. Also, to remind you that every moment of your life, whatever you do, and whatever you're thinking, Christ the Lord is sitting right there, part of the scene. That's worth remembering.

1. **The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit**

The next distinctive of the Church age is the universal indwelling of the Holy Spirit. God the Holy Spirit, at the point of salvation, comes to permanently indwell the Christian's body as His temple, to be there for power in the Christian life, and for the guidance of the individual believer. And you must look to him for that guidance on the basis of the Word of God that you have stored in your human spirit. And you must live your own life one day at a time, no matter who else in your circle does not. You'll not be held accountable for what others do. It may be grief to you, but you'll be held accountable for you yourself do. One day at a time, the Spirit of God is there to guide you. The Jew would've given anything, under the age of the Law, if he could have had that kind of personal direct guidance.

Also, I remind you again that this is real. I call it "intuitive," for want of a better word. God brings a thought to your mind. God gives direction. This is the Spirit of God leading you. He's telling you, "Do this. Don't do this. Check this. Don't say this. Say that." And after a bit of spiritual maturity, you'll learn that you don't want to ignore that. When that comes to you, you will check it out. You'll pay attention to: that's the way the Spirit of God guides us.

1. **The Universal Priesthood of the Believer**

The next distinctive is the universal priesthood of all believers. Every Christian is his own priest before God in dealing with his sins, and with his Christian service mission. What other Christians do is not your business. As an organization, what Christians do does become our business relative to the body life. But you are responsible for yourself to God. And your confession of known sins is to God – not to the public, and not to anyone else. It is between you and God. That's the privacy of your personal priesthood. You do not have to approach a throne of grace through a priest anymore, as in the Old Testament. You go directly to God. That is one of your privileges.

1. **A Completed Canon of Scripture**

Now, another distinctive feature of the Church age is the fact that we have a completed canon of scripture: "canon." The word "canon" means "standard" or "rule." No previous dispensation had the feature of a completed Bible – Old and New Testament. And that Bible is entirely trustworthy because of two principles which are enunciated for us in Scripture, by which the Bible was produced. And you'll learn a great deal more about that tonight.

However, I call your attention once more to 2 Timothy 3:16, that says, "All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reprove, for correction, for training in righteousness." All Scripture is inspired. Most of you know that word in the Greek, "theopneustos" (theh-op'-nyoo-stos), means God-breathed. It's breathed into the mind of the writer.

Then there's one other important factor that must come into play. So, now the writer has revelation from God. He knows truth. He knows truth about things that happen, as in the book of Genesis, before Moses was ever born: from creation; and, so on. And he knows other truth that God reveals to him. And that was the role of the prophet. Originally, we did have prophets. We don't have prophets anymore, but we used to have prophets who foretold the future, but they were also telling forth the mind of God at any particular point in time. That is taken over now by our explanation of Scripture.

2 Peter 1:21 tells what happens when the information has been received: "For no prophecy (for no revelation from God) was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke before God." And that word moved, "pheró" (fer'-o) in the Greek, means "born along," or "carried along," as a sailboat is carried along by the wind and the sail. Those teachings of the Word of God are by which we live.

Now because we understand the principle of dispensations, we do not try to apply the Mosaic Law to Christians who live under the era of the grace church-age. They don't fit. We don't try to follow the religious legalistic procedures of the Old Testament dispensation, any more than we worry about the first dispensation of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, of not eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. We understand that we have a completed Scripture, but we have to: "rightly divide the Word of Truth," Paul says, so that we apply the Scripture that belongs to the right people, in the right point in time. "While all the Scripture is for our understanding," Paul says, it does not all apply directly to us in any particular age."

What the Word of God does now, having it complete, is that it corrects what Colossians 1:9 refers to as "a lack” (a deficiency) with which we are all born. Colossians 1:9 says, "For this reason also." The reason is their love for one another in verse 8: "For this reason also, since we heard of it (your love), we have not ceased to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled." Now, the Greek word filled, "pléroó" (play-ro'-o), means "to bring up something that is lacking." It is a "deficiency:" "That you may have your deficiency corrected with the knowledge." And here's that Greek word "epignósis" (ep-ig'-no-sis) that we've had before. It is not just informational knowledge in the head (that "gnosis" knowledge. It is the special Greek word "epignósis," which means knowledge that you have gotten in the head from instruction of the pastor-teacher, and you said. "Amen" to it. Then it becomes useful knowledge.

We have plenty of Christians with heads full of knowledge of the Bible, but they can't live by it, because they're resistant to it. They're saying, "No." They're out of the inner circle: "This "epignósis" full knowledge of His will, in all spiritual wisdom and understanding." In other words, you are born with a human viewpoint. That is natural, and that is wrong. Gradually, that's flushed out by your knowledge of doctrine, so that doctrine is the mind of God. And the more the Word of God, and the more you refresh upon that word of God, the more you think the way God thinks. And when you think the way God thinks, then your emotions will be controlled properly. Then your will, will make the right choices. You will be acting in a God-like manner.

1. **A Supernatural Way of Life**

The next principle is that a supernatural way of life has been made possible. The Old Testament saints simply had no supernatural enablement to do right. They were told to do right, but they had no capacity to do it. In Romans 7:12, Paul says, "So then the Law (the Mosaic Law is holy), and the commandment is holy and righteous and good." Those 613 commandments were perfect. There was nothing wrong with them. They were the reflection of the way God wanted a person to live. They were expressions of righteousness. So, there was nothing wrong with that.

However, Romans 8:3 says, "For what the law could not do – perfect and holy, and right as it was: "For what the Law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh." "Weak as it was;" that is, through the sin nature. "God did, sending His Own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh." He looked like a man, and he was a man. He was a genuine human being. He just did not have one thing we had' that is, a sin nature: "And as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh." So, the Lord Jesus Christ, the sinless One, fulfill all the principles of righteousness demanded by the Law of God for us. So, now, through God the Holy Spirit in the age of grace, those principles of righteousness can be second nature to us. You don't have to run around trying to crank them up. It is your heritage, and part of what comes to you with Christ indwelling you.

The Christian has the power of the Holy Spirit to live the life of Christ through the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is pointed out to us in Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ." When I trusted Him as my Savior, I, in effect, died with Him. And it is no longer I who live (I, in my old sin nature capacities), but Christ lives in me. And the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, Who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me." I live a life now of godliness, and of fulfillment of the Mosaic code righteousness requirements, of being able to live by the power of the Holy Spirit, because I am in Chris. He is in me. He has done what needed to be done – the penalty of death in my behalf.

Human efforts, on the other hand, can absolutely never please God. Yet, we have vast religious groups that are based upon that premise – that your human good works (your doing) can please God. In Romans 7:18, the apostle says, "For I know that nothing good dwells in me that is in my flesh;" that is, in my physical being. And "in my flesh" is used here for the sin nature: "For the wishing is present with me, but the doing of the good is not." And that was the agony that Paul describes here of what it was like for him when he was a Pharisee. He was a very devoted Jew, head-and-shoulders above his peers – above those who were his age group. And he said, "I just couldn't do the things that I wanted to do. I wanted to do right, but I did wrong.

Now, for a while he thought he was great, because he could say, "I don't worship a false God. I never have. I don't make images. I respect the Sabbath day as holy. I honor my parents. I don't steal. I don't commit adultery. I don't commit sexual sins." And he went right down the line, and he said, "I'm superior." But then he got to the last one, and in another place he says, "And then I got to the commandment that says, 'You shall not covet." And suddenly, he said, "A bell rang. I got hit right between the eyes, because I had a say to myself, 'Boy, do I ever covet?'" And suddenly, he realized that all the other commandments were overt, external sins. So he could say, "I don't do that. I don't do that." But suddenly, he realized that mental attitude sins, that James speaks about, is the source of overt sins. That was what brought him down. And that finally crushed him. And he realized that he was a lost sinner.

Up to then, like the Jews to this day make the mistake that if they lived the good life of the Law, they're going to heaven. And Paul said, "Because of my covetousness, I had broken all of the Law.

So, this is what he means here in his verse: "Boy did I want to do good, and yet I could not do it. But then you get over to a great victory here, in Romans 8:8-9: "And those who are in the flesh (under the domination of the old sin nature – out of the inner circle of temporal fellowship) cannot please God. However, you Christians are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you" – and He does. This "if" is in the first-class condition in the Greek. It is true: "But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him." You cannot go into a meeting, and pray to receive the Holy Spirit. Some religious groups do that. If you don't have the Holy Spirit, you're not even saved. And those who are in the flesh cannot please God. You are not in the flesh. The Spirit of God dwells in you. If He didn't, you would not be a believer.

So, the point is that, no matter how much good works you may perform, it's all tainted by your sin nature. So, there are two kinds of evil: overt sins (and mental attitude sins); and, human good. Our world calls it "compassion." It is produced by the sin nature, and God says, "I vomit it out. It's offensive evil."

The Christian, thank God, is not under the Law system of trying to live his life. That's what I'm trying to get across to you. You have the magnificent grace system for living. Romans 6:14 says, "For sin (singular – the sin nature) shall not be master over you. For you are not under the Law, but under Grace." In the Old Testament, sin was always the master over these poor people – the best of them, from Abraham on down. But now, you can live infinitely more superior than any of the great saints of the Old Testament. You have the capacity.

That was so staggering that one man came up last Sunday and asked me about it, to be sure that he understood that that's what I was saying. I said, "That's what the Scriptures say." You are able to do what no one in the Old Testament could do, for the simple fact that you are not under the Law system, trying to make it on your own. You are not a slave anymore to the sin nature, because Christ has freed you from that. You're not under the judgment of the Law, because He fulfilled all of those. So, you're free of that. All of that goes to your credit, as if you had done it. That's what it means to be under grace. That's what it means to live in the age of the church.

1. **The Filling of the Holy Spirit**

There is one more magnificent difference, and that is the filling of the Holy Spirit. This is not the same thing as the baptism of the Holy Spirit. And we've been over that before. The Holy Spirit desires to fill every believer, or to control that believer. This is the territory of being filled with the Spirit, right here in the inner circle. At this point, Ephesians 5:18 points out to us, "Do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit" – under the control of the Holy Spirit. This inner circle is the normative life of the Christian.

When evil of sin or human good take you out into this outer circle of carnality, then the Spirit of God no longer controls, and you are no longer guided by Him. But sin does come in, and the break does happen. And that's why, for the unbeliever, the most important verse in the Bible is something like Acts 16:31: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shall be saved." Or, John 3:16. But once you're saved, the next thing a person has to be told is how to stay in that inner circle of spiritual fellowship, so that they can be developing into spiritual maturity. And that verse is 1 John 1:9. And most Christians (most newborn Christians) are never introduced to this verse. That is because this verse, speaking to Christians, says, "If we confess (admit) our sins, He is a faithful (God the Father is faithful) and righteous to forgive us." He's righteous because He's paid for that sin. Sin is no longer the problem: "To forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." This means the sins that we're not even aware of, or are forgotten. When we confess, we're right back there into the inner circle of fellowship. And that is what constitutes a spiritual Christian. It's different than spiritual maturity, but we will get to that.

What this enables the Christian to do, in that inner circle, is to follow the grace system of perception, to be able to move on toward spiritual maturity. The grace system of perception, as you know, begins with the local church, and with the pastor-teacher instruction in doctrine; and, for the Christian in temporal fellowship to be able to listen in the privacy of his own mind there in that congregation. And he can say, "Amen," or he can say, "No, I don't want to do that." He can go either way. And the result is (if he says, "Amen" to it) that he will develop a spiritual frame of reference. This is the grace system. Apart from human IQ, you can become a magnificent person, through the Word of God.

The result will be 2 Corinthians 12:10, where Paul says, "Therefore, I'm well content with weakness; with insults; with stresses; with persecutions; and, with difficulties." These constitute the five features of the spiritual maturity structure of the soul that we've gone over before. They enable you to meet life. Paul says, "I'm glad to have these things (these difficulties), and all that they constitute for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then I'm strong." When I'm weak, I am not depending upon myself, and not arrogantly thinking that I can make it in life, because I happen to have money, and prestige, and position. He says, "When I am nothing, in my realization of my helplessness without God, then I am strong. That's when you make it.

So, this filling of the Holy Spirit is key to be able to grow up spiritually. And if you have never been taught how to maintain the filling of the Holy Spirit, do you realize what that means? You can go your whole life as a Christian, always outside of the inner circle. Then you put on religion, and you look around, and you see this group that you're with: how they act; how they dress; and, how they talk, and you're imitating: all outside; and nothing internal. And eventually you crash. All of the divine good that you'll ever produce in your Christian service comes as a result of being filled with the Spirit.

In Titus 2:14, Paul says, "Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed, and purify For himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds." These good deeds are the product of the Christian who is under the filling of the Holy Spirit.

Yes, you can walk up to that offering box, and put a lot of money in it under the motivation of the old sin nature, and it means zilch for you in eternal rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ. You can do the same thing under the filling of the Holy Spirit, and it means magnificent returns. We have fakery; and, we have reality. Don't ever forget that it only takes a small deviation in your compass heading. And the farther you go, the farther away you are from your objective of life in the Lord Jesus Christ.

So when you step out of line, that's when you fix it. That's when you cease and desist. That's when you correct it. That's when you admit. That's when you rise to true Christian royal manhood and royal womanhood.

It is a filling of the Holy Spirit that gives us a ground to be able to pray. Without the filling of the Holy Spirit, it's an empty, tiresome, useless exercise. Ephesians 6:18: "With all prayer and petition, pray at all times in the Spirit" – whatever you need to ask (the normal things or the emergency things), pray at all times in the Spirit. This is the way to go through the day: praying without ceasing.

Also, in Acts 1:8, the filling of the Holy Spirit is not only the ground for prayer, but it is the ground for our ability to witness effectively. Acts 1:8: "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you (which you did on the day of Pentecost), "And you shall be my witnesses, both in Jerusalem and all Judea, Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth." No witnessing can be done effectively without a true gospel message. There is no cutesy-pooh, like: "invite Jesus into your heart;" "give Him your life; and, all these other pop Christianity phrases that are non-biblical and mean nothing: "But believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." Those words become life because you are filled with the Spirit when you say them. And the conviction of God hits a person, and they realize what they need, and they believe it.

Finally, this is the way we do what we're supposed to do every day of our life: glorify the Lord Jesus Christ. That's what Jesus, in His humanity, at the end of His ministry was able to say: "I have glorified You, My Father." He was a glory to God. And it was because He was always filled with the Spirit. And He always did, therefore, the will of the Father. Being filled with the Spirit enables you to be a credit to the Lord Jesus Christ, and thus to honor him, which means to glorify him.

In John 16:14, Jesus says, "The Holy Spirit Who has come will glorify Me, for He shall take of Mine and shall disclose it to you:" "What the Holy Spirit brings you will enable you to glorify Me." But if you're out of temporal fellowship of the inner circle, the Holy Spirit is going to bring you nothing. And you'll never be able to glorify God your Father.

So, these are seven magnificent distinctives of the age of Grace. That should now give you a realization that this dispensation is so different. This dispensation that has positional truth; the baptism of the Holy Spirit that places you into Christ; the universal indwelling of Christ, Who lives within you, so that all His riches become yours; the universal indwelling and permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit to be there as your guide and power in living; the universal priesthood of all believers to represent themselves before God; the magnificence of a supernatural way of life, which is made possible because we have the power of God to enable us to live that life; the great and glorious filling of the Holy Spirit; and, the completed canon of Scripture.

These seven things are what make us so different, and so much more capable of having a good life. If you want to grovel around in the dirt, go ahead and do it. But don't blame God for the fact that the life is rotten instead of great and blessed, and one such that you'll stand unashamed at the Judgment Seat of Christ when it's evaluated for rewards or loss.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1995

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