

GRACE Great Good News!

June 2001

Well, here I am again, not really knowing what I am doing with this newsletter ☺ ... but still desiring it! I yearn not to express my opinion of what is right, but to express Christ's life who is the Light! I actually feel foolish at times trying to do this newsletter. But I am learning to have faith in Christ, rather than in my feelings. I simply trust that He is giving me the desires of my heart (Psalm 37:4).

If sometimes you don't understand all that is presented in this newsletter, please know that I don't either ☺ (Philippians 3:12)! But I believe the Message with all my heart. I hope you sense true Life in the words (1 John 1:1-4), not principles for striving to live by.

This newsletter is now sent to over 100 people - family, friends, board members of Christ Life Ministries, my pastor, other pastors. I want to be open and accountable to those who know me. Each month I seek to condense truths revealed to me in order to share with others. Years ago, A.B. Simpson wrote that the way to share God's truths "is to see in them the face of love, shining through and through; not ideas, nor doctrines, but Jesus Himself as the Life and Source and sustaining Presence of all of our life," (2 Corinthians 4:6). Gregg ☺

PRISON MINISTRY

The director of Christ Life Ministries and I spent several days this month in sweet fellowship with 20 men in the Henderson County Correctional Center around the truths in **Romans 1:16-17**. These verses reveal that the gospel of Christ: (1) is the power of God unto salvation and (2) is how the *righteousness of God* is revealed. These verses show that *righteousness* is the heart of the gospel. Therefore, understanding *righteousness* is key to receiving and then living the gospel.

What is the first thing you think of when you hear the word *righteous* or *righteousness*? Many of us think of behavior. However, God says in **1 Corinthians 1:30** that Jesus Himself has become *righteousness* to us! So, *righteousness* is a Person, not behavior! [Keep reading ☺!] To the Christian, Christ is his identity! He is one with Christ! A man at prison said *righteousness* is "right standing" before God. I like that. We discussed that this refers to "right standing" and not "right doing!"

Romans 5:19 says that those who trust Christ are "*made righteous*" through His finished work on the cross. We don't become *righteous* through our behavior. God declares a Christian *righteous*. God who spoke the worlds into existence through Christ (**Colossians 1:16**), also speaks a man's *righteousness* into existence through Christ (**Romans 4:21-24**, **2 Corinthians 5:21**)!

Sin is the opposite of *righteousness*. **Romans 5:19** also says that all are "*made sinners*" through the work of Adam at the tree. We all are born sinners at heart. People sin because they are sinners - they are not sinners because they sin. Another man at the prison testified about how vital this truth is to know. If a person sees he is a sinner only because he sins, he will be tempted to be good by trying not to sin! A person must see that his heart is sinful to the core with no hope outside of Christ.

So, people don't become sinners through behavior - they are born that way! And people don't become *righteous* through behavior - they are re-born that way! Repentance in a person is a change of mind to see that *righteousness is a gift* through Christ and not a reward through works. Some people seek salvation without repentance, trying to obtain salvation (*righteousness*) by good works. And some Christians subtly live without a repentant lifestyle, seeking to maintain *righteousness* by good works. It is so tempting to try to "get right with God" with our own behavior, although we already have "got it all in Christ" through His *righteous behavior* in His completed journey to and through the cross for us (**Ephesians 1:3**).

Good works will be abundant as a fruit of one's *righteous identity*. However, without knowing the truth of being the *righteousness of Christ*, a Christian can subtly strive to produce *good works for God*, instead of simply bearing the *good works of God*! We have the awesome privilege of bearing *the righteous fruits of Christ's majestic indwelling life* (**Galatians 5:22-23**)! I wish you could see the fruit of joy expressed through the *righteous* men in the prison who know true freedom in Christ (**John 8:32, 34**) ☺!

GRACE NOTE

"Are we willing to undergo much persecution, suffering, and opposition for the sake of the gospel?
The temptation is everywhere to doubt your righteousness before God being based on Christ plus nothing.

Salvation, peace, righteousness, and truth is found in Christ alone.

If we are to boldly proclaim the gospel, we must be convinced of it ourselves."

(John Money Penny, Grace Walk Ministries, www.gracewalk.org)