

Grace Killer #3: The Foolishness of Self-Perfection

REVIEW

Grace Killer #1: Combining Covenants

Error: We are under the New Covenant, but parts of the Old Covenant also apply to New Covenant believers.

Truth: The Old Covenant was for THE JEWS ONLY. No Christian at any time has been under the Old Covenant. When the New Covenant was made, the Old was done away with. It is obsolete. We are under ONE covenant, the New Covenant.

Grace Killer #2: Not Understanding What Paul Meant by “Law”

Error: When Paul wrote that we are not under the law, he meant the ceremonial and civil laws, not the Ten Commandments.

Truth: When Paul wrote “law”, he meant the whole law. The Ten Commandments ARE the Old Covenant and the Old Covenant is OBSOLETE. To fully understand the gospel of God’s grace, WE MUST UNDERSTAND THAT WE ARE FREE FROM THE ENTIRE OLD COVENANT.

Grace Killer #3: THE FOOLISHNESS OF SELF-PERFECTION

Error: Jesus did everything that needed to be done to get us saved, but AFTER THAT we need to maintain and improve ourselves through our own discipline and diligence (usually through following laws and doing good works).

Truth: We cannot improve upon our relationship and perfect right-standing with God which HE accomplished through the death of His Son Jesus. The MORE that God wants us to have, the maturation that we experience, and the good works He wants us to do, are all gifts to us by His grace.

Galatians 3:1-3

*O **foolish** Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? ² This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? ³ Are you so **foolish**? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?*

•Strong’s Definition of “foolish”

anoētos (an-o'-ay-tos)

From G1 (as a negative particle) and a derivative of G3539; unintelligent; by implication sensual: - fool (-ish), unwise.

Thayer Definition:

- 1) not understood, unintelligible
- 2) not understanding, unwise, foolish

Anoetos comes from two words “a” meaning “Not/without”, and “noieo”.

•Strong’s Definition of *noieō* (noy-eh'-o)

To exercise the mind (observe), that is, (figuratively) to comprehend, heed: - consider, perceive, think, understand.

In other words, foolishness is to NOT exercise the mind, to NOT observe, to NOT comprehend, to NOT heed, consider perceive, think, or understand.

The word is anoetos. It denotes the stupidity that arises from deadness and impotence of intellect. It means "lacking in the power of perception unwise." It refers to one who does not reflect. The word speaks of failure to use one's powers of perception. The Galatians, Paul says, were certainly not using their heads. The word is used with an ethical reference as the faculty of moral judgment.¹

To perfect/epiteleo

Thayer: 1) to bring to an end, accomplish, perfect, execute, complete

Strong's: to fulfill further (or completely), that is, execute; by implication to terminate,

undergo: - accomplish, do, finish, (make) (perfect), perform

In verse 2, Paul speaks of the initial entrance of the Holy Spirit into the hearts of the Galatian Christians when they put their trust in the Lord Jesus. In this verse, he is speaking of the sanctifying work of the Spirit in the lives of these saints. He asks the question, "Are you to such a degree irrational? Having begun your Christian life in dependence upon the indwelling Spirit, are you now being brought on to the state of spiritual maturity by means of self-effort?"

The words made perfect are from epiteleo which means "to bring something to the place where it is complete." The cognate noun is the word Paul uses when he speaks of a spiritually mature Christian, one who is living a well-rounded, well-balanced, mature life. By the word flesh here he refers to all that a person is as the product of natural generation apart from the morally transforming power of the Holy Spirit in regeneration. The word speaks of the unsaved man, body, soul, and spirit, controlled by his totally depraved nature, together with all his human accomplishments, positions, capabilities, and philosophies. See the following scriptures as illustrations of this use: John 3:6; Philippians 3:3, 4; Romans 6:19, 7:5, 18, 25, 8:3; 2 Corinthians 1:17.

The Judaizers in preaching a message of law obedience to the Galatian Christians, caused these latter to abandon the position of grace and put themselves in the sphere of law, both that of the Judaizers' system of legalism, and that of the Old Testament economy. Because there was no provision in the Mosaic economy for an indwelling Spirit who would sanctify the believer as that believer trusted Him for that work, the Galatians were turning away from the teaching and the reality of the ministry of the Spirit in the life of the believer in this dispensation of grace, and were starting to depend upon self-effort in an attempt to obey an outward legalistic system of works. Thus these Christians who had begun their Christian lives in dependence upon the Holy Spirit, now were depending upon self-effort to continue in them the work of sanctification which the Holy Spirit had begun. The present tense of the verb here indicates that the Galatians had already begun this attempt. Paul says in effect, "How foolish to think that you can bring yourselves to a state of spiritual maturity in your Christian lives. That is the work of the Spirit. Only He can do that for you."²

¹ Wuest's Word Studies - Wuest's Word Studies - Volume 1: Word Studies in the Greek New Testament.

² Wuest's Word Studies - Wuest's Word Studies - Volume 1: Word Studies in the Greek New Testament.

**We begin in the Spirit, and we are being made perfect by the Spirit.
To think otherwise is FOOLISHNESS and it nullifies grace.
In essence, WE take over the Holy Spirit's work in our lives.**

HOW DOES THE CHURCH STRAY FROM THESE TRUTHS?

IN THE BEGINNING:

We are born again by grace through faith, not of works. We are so happy to be a child of God. We know the living God and we can sense His great love for us. We are so full of His peace and joy. We begin to lose the desire to sin. We are praying constantly, can't stop reading the Bible, and we are telling everyone we know what happened to us.

**→We don't ever want to lose this blessedness.
Everything is changing, and we wonder, what do I do now?
How do I maintain this joy and peace?←**

The answer should be, "Continue in what you've been given, and trust HIM to supply you with all He has and all you need by simply responding to His grace in faith."

BUT the answer we get back from the religious system **KILLS GRACE**. It makes all that God intended to be a **GIFT** to us something for which we must work to obtain.

The idea that WE need to DO SOMETHING (obey laws and do good deeds) to get "MORE" HAPPENS ALMOST IMMEDIATELY and can come through a variety of venues:

1. A new converts' class
2. A tract for new believers
3. Teachings from the pulpit
4. "Christian" books
5. "Christian" television and radio
6. "Christian" websites
7. "Christian" music
8. Word-of-mouth experience "theology"
9. Discipleship training
10. Shepherding, accountability partners, coaching, spiritual authority

FAULTY PREMISES:

1. There ***is*** MORE we need to do to be "right".
→ *Jesus death and resurrection was just the beginning (it ultimately was not enough).*
2. We need to ***desire*** MORE of God (the assumption being we don't have all of Him yet—truly foolishness).
FALSE!!! → *Feeling satisfied must be squelched. If you don't desire more of God, you need to get on your face and ask God to give you that desire. You need to work yourself into a state of "desperation for God".*

3. We need to ***seek* MORE.**

→ *Jesus saved you by grace through faith, but now you need to improve? NOT TRUE!*

FAULTY CONCLUSIONS (based on faulty premises):

1. If there is MORE, I want it.
2. To get MORE, I must seek it.
3. If I feel satisfied, something is WRONG with me, and I need to take action.

MORE of and CLOSER to God

1. **WRONG:** Our relationship and closeness with God must be improved.
 - We need to know Him MORE.
 - We need to get **CLOSER** to Him.
 - We need to “cultivate” a hunger and thirst for MORE of God.
 - We need to experience MORE of His “presence”.
2. **WRONG:** Our right-standing with God has to be maintained or improved.
 - We need to be MORE righteous by “getting right” with God.
 - We need to make our lives increasingly MORE holy/sanctified.
 - We need to be MORE forgiven by daily (if not hourly) confession of sins.
 - We seek to **perfect/complete** what Jesus began.

→ **We incorrectly seek to please God MORE**
by being **BETTER** or doing **MORE**. ←

SO... We start with a faulty premise: There's more, and we need to desire it and seek it. Based on that faulty premise, we falsely conclude: If there's more, I want it. Then, based on that false conclusion, we give/receive incorrect guidance: We need to practice “spiritual disciplines so that we may know God more and be closer to Him.

THE LIST THAT NEVER ENDS

Please Note: It is unlikely you will find this list anywhere. It isn't taught in one teaching, but rather, accumulated over time.

1. *Pray a certain number of minutes or times each day, preferably at 6:00 am and on your knees or prostrate before Him.*
2. *Read a certain number or chapters each day.*
3. *Meditate, study, memorize, confess, sing the Scriptures daily.*
4. *Go to church “each time the church doors open”.*
5. *Show unconditional and unquestioning allegiance to your pastors and anyone who would be considered “God's anointed”.*
6. *Give 10% on your gross income.*
7. *Give more than ten percent called “sacrificial giving”.*

**Are you so foolish?
Having begun in the Spirit,
are you now being made perfect by the flesh?
Galatians 3:3**

We usually think of “the flesh” as pertaining to sin, but Paul uses it to refer to RELIGIOUS efforts to be made perfect.

8. *Get involved in a small group fellowship.*
9. *Get involved in ministry; preferably heavily involved (be one of the 20% and not those lazy 80% pew warming people)....and oh, don't “church hop”, find a place and go there.*
10. *Fast regularly. If you are really spiritual you will one day do a 40 day fast.*
11. *Go to Bible school instead of a regular college.*
12. *Go into ministry instead of a “secular” career.*
13. *Be successful in ministry or at least in your vocation.*
14. *Be pure in every thought, word, and deed.*
15. *Confess daily every known sin so that you can be pure enough to be in God's presence, and so you don't miss the rapture due to “unconfessed sin”.*
16. *Live a holy life (no movies, secular music, television, dancing, alcohol, etc.)*
17. **This list has no end.** *Just when you think you are doing everything, you will hear a sermon about some other things you didn't know about.*

A former teaching pastor at Willow Creek Community Church, defines “spiritual disciplines” this way, “Any activity that can help me gain power to live life as Jesus taught and modeled it. How many spiritual disciplines are there? As many as we can think of.” (God HELP us!)

**What if you can't think of any more spiritual disciplines?
What if they aren't paying off as you were told they would?**

If you are not getting results doing these things, consider: (Again, these ideas are FALSE.)

1. *Doubling your efforts or*
2. *Attending seminars or reading books in order to learn how to improve the quality of how you do these things or*
3. *Keep examining yourself for possible hidden sins.*
4. ***Keep going in the same fruitless direction. Being miserable is normal for a Christian. The Christian life is hard. Learn how to accept this and move on.***

What we don't understand is that **we walk away from grace** when we add ANY RELIGIOUS, PERSONAL, CULTURAL, SOCIETAL, OR INSTITUTIONAL LAW as a means of maintaining or improving our relationship and right-standing with God.

STOP THIS MADNESS!!!

THE “MORE” GOD WANTS TO GIVE US

IN A GOOD WAY, there is MORE for us after we receive Jesus, but it is imperative that we understand that when it come to our right-standing with God and our closeness to Him, we need nothing more. Yet, He has so much more to give, and it is God Himself who GIVES the “MORE”. We simply RECEIVE more by FAITH.

The MORE that God wants to give us is a GIFT to us. We can't earn it. We simply believe and receive it by grace through faith.

1. He FREELY gives us all things.

Romans 8:31-32

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He \rightarrow not with Him also \rightarrow freely give \leftarrow us all things?

2. We receive MORE strength and become MORE rooted and grounded in love by His gift and through His Spirit.

Ephesians 3:14-19

*For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵ from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, ¹⁶ that He would **grant** you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, ¹⁷ that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—¹⁹ to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*

3. It is He who gives us MORE than we can ask or think and by HIS power.

Ephesians 3:20-21

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, ²¹ to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

4. It is God who gives wisdom and revelation to understand what He has done FOR us in Christ.

Ephesians 1:15-21

*Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, ¹⁶ do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers:¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may **give** to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, ¹⁸ the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power ²⁰ which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.*

What about OUR ULTIMATE SALVATION? Don't we have to live in a certain way to stay saved?

NO. Our initial, continual, and ultimate salvation are all by His grace through faith. He saved us initially, and now He saves us by His life. We are saved from wrath, not from obeying laws, but because of Him.

Romans 5:6-11

*For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. ⁸But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹**Much more then,** having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath **through Him.** ¹⁰For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of **His Son,** **much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.** ¹¹And **not only that,** but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now **received** the reconciliation.*

Can we improve our RIGHTEOUSNESS?

Don't we need to live righteously in order to maintain and improve our righteousness?

NO. Righteousness (justification) is a gift (grace) received by faith. We live righteously BECAUSE we are righteous, not in order to be righteous.

Romans 5:17 AMPLIFIED

*For if because of one man's trespass (lapse, offense) death reigned through that one, much more surely will those who receive [God's] overflowing grace (unmerited favor) and the **free gift of righteousness** [putting them into right standing with Himself] reign as kings in life through the one Man Jesus Christ (the Messiah, the Anointed One).*

2 Corinthians 5:21

*For He made Him who knew no sin to be a sin offering for us, that we might become the **righteousness of God** in Him.*

We are not only righteous but we are the very righteousness of God.

This was by HIS sacrifice, not ours.

We can't improve on this.

Can we improve our HOLINESS?

What about HOLINESS? Don't we need to become holier by separating ourselves from the world?

NO. Holiness is a gift that we receive and grow in by grace through faith.

Hebrews 10:10

*By that will we have been sanctified (have been made holy) through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ **once for all.***

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.

What about good works and ministry?

Even our ministries and our ability to do them, however difficult they might be, are by His grace. Whatever He calls us to do, He provides the grace to do it.

1 Corinthians 15:10

But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.

**What about “knowing God”? Shouldn’t we seek to “know Him more”?
NO. We KNOW Him from Day One. Period.**

“MORE” MIXTURE:

We hear so many sermons on “how to know God” as if we don’t know Him at all or at least not very well. We also hear about knowing God “more”. More!!! This is to say that what Jesus did was not enough...we need to improve upon it (and we improve on it by keeping “the list”).

THE TRUTH THAT SETS FREE:

One of the main features of the New Covenant is that we know God “from the least (youngest) to the greatest (oldest)” because our sins have been completely forgiven.

Jeremiah 31:31, 34

“Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant... ³⁴ They will not teach again (AGAIN AND AGAIN, REPEATEDLY, DAY AFTER DAY), each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for (BECAUSE) they will ALL know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the LORD, for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”

Know, YADA³

1. To perceive with certainty; to understand clearly; to have a clear and certain perception of truth, fact, or any thing that actually exists. To know a thing precludes all doubt or uncertainty of its existence.

1 John 5:20

And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding that we may know Him who is true.

**When we operate under the false premise that we NEED to know Him at all (as if we don’t), let alone MORE...we begin to rely again on our own self-righteousness... and become ESTRANGED from Him.
Instead of feeling we know Him MORE,
we feel we know Him less...or He seems far away.**

³ Webster’s

Aren't we supposed to get "CLOSER" to God?

No. We are as perfectly close to God at salvation as we even need to be because of what JESUS did, and never as a result of what we do.

"MORE" MIXTURE:

Getting "closer" to God sounds like a very religious thing to do...of course, to do this you must adhere to "the list" **AND THE CLEAR IMPLICATION IS THAT YOU CAN ALWAYS GET CLOSER...WHICH MEANS YOU ARE NEVER CLOSE ENOUGH.**

THE TRUTH THAT SETS FREE:

Jesus Christ lives INSIDE of us. It is impossible to get closer than that. God went out of His way to provide perfect closeness with Him. Religion says He didn't do enough and WE need to improve on what God ALREADY did through the death of His son. **LUDICROUS!!!**

- ◆ If you do a search on the words "closer or nearer" in the New Testament, you **WILL NOT FIND THEM WHEN REFERRING TO OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.**

Colossians 1:27

*To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is **CHRIST IN YOU**, the hope of glory.*

1 Corinthians 6:17

*But he who is joined to the Lord is **ONE SPIRIT WITH HIM.***

- ◆ **Jesus provided for all time the closeness and life we all desire.**

1 Corinthians 15:21-22

For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. ²² For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. (For in Adam all are separated, even so in Christ all shall be made near).

How could we EVER improve on what JESUS has accomplished?

Aren't we supposed to "cultivate" a hunger, thirst, and desperation for God?

NO. THIS IS AN ENORMOUS LIE. It teaches Christians the concept of **NEVER BEING SATISFIED** and the belief they can/must **IMPROVE** on what Jesus did.

THE TRUTH THAT SETS FREE:

ONE OF THE MAIN GLORIES OF BEING BORN AGAIN IS SATISFACTION. RELIGION STEALS THIS FROM US BY TELLING US WE NEED TO SEEK FOR MORE. Yet, what did Jesus say?

John 6:35

And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.

John 4:14

*Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a **fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.**"*

Try telling someone that you are completely satisfied in your relationship with God or that you are not hungry or thirsty for God. You will discover quickly that IT IS SIMPLY NOT ACCEPTABLE TO RELIGIOUS PEOPLE FOR CHRISTIANS TO BE SATISFIED.

Shouldn't believers seek the "manifest" presence of God when they gather in His name?

NO. Jesus promised to be with us when we gathered in His name. There is no need to seek His presence for His presence is in each one of us. We don't need a sign to know he's present.

"MORE" MIXTURE:

God's presence comes and goes as we pray it down, beg it down, bargain it down, behave weirdly in worship (shake, rattle, and roll), grunt and groan it down.

THE TRUTH THAT SETS FREE

We are NOT under the OLD Covenant. We are not like the pagans who need to work themselves into trances in order to conjure up spirits. We are under the New. His presence is ALWAYS WITH US.

Hebrews 13:5

For He Himself has said, "I will NEVER LEAVE you nor forsake you."

Shouldn't we be seeking the return of signs and wonders by praying diligently, fasting, calling out to God 24/7, laying on the graves of anointed men of God to get their anointing, etc., etc., etc.?

NO.

THE TRUTH THAT SETS FREEH

Galatians 3:3-5 (notice verse 5 is in context with being FOOLISH)

Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh? ⁴ Have you suffered so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? ⁵ Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, does He do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

1 Peter 2:24

Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed.

Normally, the concept of PERFECTING OURSELVES BY OUR OWN EFFORT (FOOLISHNESS) is taught with all the best motives at heart, but NONETHELESS, it is DEADLY MIXTURE. If we add law, any kind of law, to grace, it CEASES TO BE GRACE. Not only that, when we attempt to be made righteous by law, we fall from grace and become estranged from Christ.

So, what is the answer? How do we live the Christian life? The answer is simple...the same way we received it...by grace through faith, NOT BY OUR SELF-EFFORT, BUT BY HIS DOING.

Using Hebrews 10:14 and Philippians 1:6 we can conclude that we are both perfected (telieoo) in regard to everything Jesus accomplished on the cross, and subsequently brought to a state of completion (epiteleio), which most certainly refers to our maturation, or one might say, to fulfilling what Jesus already accomplished. This would include aspects such as being transformed by the renewing of our mind (Rom. 12:2) and from glory to glory by beholding Jesus (2 Cor. 3:18). We aren't born again knowing every right from wrong, but grace teaches us to forsake worldly lusts and to live godly (Ti. 2:12). The fruit of the Spirit grows (Gal. 5:22). Our character develops (Rom. 5:3-4). We become rooted and grounded in God's love (Eph. 3:17). Our understanding and appreciation of what was accomplished through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection becomes clearer to us (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Our discernment between good and evil matures (Heb. 5:14).

Let me put it this way. Everything that Scripture teaches was accomplished by Christ's death is "finished." Yet, there is a process of our current perfection being brought to completion from beginning to end. **What is essential to understand is that it is Jesus who brings to completion this work that He started—not we through our own efforts. This growth comes by the working of the Holy Spirit in our lives.**⁴

Hebrews 10:14 (NASB)

For by one offering He has perfected for all time (telieoo) those who are sanctified.

Philippians 1:6 (NKJV)

Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete (epiteleio) it until the day of Jesus Christ

Colossians 2:6-10

As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him,⁷ rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.⁸ **Beware** lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.⁹ For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily;¹⁰ and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.

2 Corinthians 3:18

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

1 Corinthians 1:30-31

But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption,³¹ so that, just as it is written, "LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD."

Out of this relationship and right-standing we have been given, the fruits we desire will come. He did the work. We simply rest in what He has done.

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.²⁴ He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.

⁴ Are We Preaching "Another" Gospel? by C. D. Hildebrand, Day 5

"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

John 15:5

P.S.

**You ARE abiding in Him, and
He is abiding in you.**

To Him ALONE be all the praise for what HE has done.