

1st John 3:4 Law and Grace, Faith and Works

Christ, the Fulfillment of the Law

To understand our position, with relation to the law, as Christians, it helps to look at Jesus our example. He said, beginning in Matthew 5:17 **17 “Do not presume that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill... The view of lawless people is diametrically opposed, to the teaching of Jesus, and as Jesus says in the passage—is a dangerous and deadly “presumption”.** Paul points out that life in Christ is death to sin. Because we have been saved by grace, not by works, we are a new creation that CANNOT continue to live in the old way. He says in Rom 6:1-7 **6 What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? 2 Far from it! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? God’s grace brings liberty from the slavery of sin and not liberty to sin. We are dead to sin, but alive IN CHRIST! And, in 1st John, John is warning his beloved brothers and sisters that these gnostic teachers around Ephesus and other places were trying to lead them astray. The writer of Hebrews reminds the reader that salvation itself may be jeopardized if someone rejects following Jesus, and the gospel is forsaken **4 For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, 5 and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, 6 and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.** You don’t want to be anywhere near that line, folks. Don’t play with your salvation. You can get to the point that you reject Christ, the ONLY salvation for sin, and if He is not your Lord, then God will be your Judge. Those are the only two relationships available with God.**

James in particular emphasizes that real faith is active faith, lived out in our lives **James 2:14-18 14 What use is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,” yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? 17 In the same way, faith also, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.** In other words, when your faith stops as just words “Go, in Peace, Be Warmed and Filled”, “I’ll pray for you”, or whatever we might say that doesn’t meet the need, then we probably haven’t followed the urging of the Holy Spirit as we should, and probably haven’t lived out our faith in the way that we’re supposed to.

Faith or Works

So, wait, James is saying we’re justified by works and faith, but Paul emphasizes that sola fide, faith alone in Christ’s righteousness is the only alternative to a damning system of works-based righteousness: **“Now to the one who works, his wage is not reckoned as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness”** In other words, those who trust Jesus Christ for justification by faith alone receive a perfect righteousness that is reckoned to them. Those who attempt to establish their own righteousness or mix faith with works only receive the horrible wage (eternal death) that is due all who fall short of perfection.

Jesus, and all the New Testament writers call us to diligence in living righteous lives BECAUSE of what HE has done for us, and not to take it for granted, according to the deceitfulness of the false teachers. 2 Peter in 1:4-11 tell us that through Jesus’ work on the cross, we have been granted everything we need for a godly life, as we become imitators of Jesus saying **5 Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, 6 and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, 7 and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. 8 For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they do not make you useless nor unproductive in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 For the one who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins. 10 Therefore, brothers and sisters, be**

all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choice of you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; 11 for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you. Peter is saying that it's our noticing in OURSELVES that our righteousness is increasing is what makes our calling and election sure. We know that HE has chosen us before the foundation of the Earth, and that we are His, BECAUSE of our changed lives. But, with this comes a deeper and deeper appreciation of sin, as God sees it. And so, we see the Apostle John in 1st John 1:10 **10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.** John is writing against those false teachers who were saying that they were free from sin, and thereby putting themselves on a pedestal and attracting people to their teaching. 1st John 1:8 says **8 If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.** So, this easy-believism resulted in a blindness to the sin in their lives, and a false-belief that they were "alright with God", that everything was fine, when they were still in their sins. John reminds us in 1st John 1:9 **9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous, so that He will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.** Praise God! But those who think that they have no sin, and yet, are living just like the world put themselves in a place where they will never confess their sins, and will never be cleansed from all unrighteousness, BECAUSE they are blinded to their need for repentance! And so, we come to an understanding that we are saved by Grace through Faith in Jesus' finished work on the cross alone! And we trust only in what Jesus has done—our works do not save us. But the New Testament writers are unanimous, in saying that IF we are indeed saved, THEN we will produce works of righteousness, and if we don't have any desire to live righteous lives, as followers of Jesus, then we're not really Jesus-followers, Christians, at all!
and sin is lawlessness.

Every sin is a transgression, breaking the law, against God because sin violates His moral standard for human beings. Since God created us, then He has the right to define boundaries for us, and to judge us if we do not meet that standard. AS followers of God, we are supposed to "**whose delight is in the law of the LORD**" (Psalm 1:2). "**I long for your salvation, LORD,**" writes the psalmist, "**and your law gives me delight**" (Psalm 119:174). The contrast between lawlessness and love could not be clearer: "**Their hearts are callous and unfeeling, but I delight in your law**" (Psalm 119:70). Why would a Christ-follower want to live as "far" away from Him as possible?!

There is a vast difference between someone who sins, as we all do Romans 3:10 **10 as it is written: "There is no righteous person, not even one;** and that anyone who says he is without sin is deceiving himself and the truth is not in him. A lawless person is one who has given himself or herself over completely to a sinful lifestyle. Lawless people either do not believe in God or refuse to acknowledge His right to rule their lives **14 The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they have committed detestable acts; There is no one who does good.** (Psalm 14:1). Those who persist in lawlessness will not inherit the kingdom of God 1 Cor 6:9-10 **9 Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived;** and then he goes it to a list of sins of those who will not inherit the Kingdom. There's another list in Gal 5:19-21 .

Jesus warned that in the end times lawlessness will increase and "the love of many will grow cold" (Matthew 24:9-12). **9 "Then they will hand you over to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name. 10 And at that time many will fall away, and they will [g]betray one another and hate one another. 11 And many false prophets will rise up and mislead many people. 12 And because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will become cold. 13 But the one who endures to the end is the one who will be saved.** Jesus ties tribulation and persecution for His name's sake, and martyrdom, and hatred of His followers by the world with lawlessness. When an attitude of lawlessness pervades the atmosphere, people stop wondering about right and wrong. This was the exact attitude of the self-righteous Pharisees and teachers of the law. **46 But He said, "Woe to you lawyers as well! For you load people with burdens that are hard to bear, while you yourselves will not even**

touch the burdens with one of your fingers. Every act of sin is an example of lawlessness because it is a violation of God's standard of holiness and His perfect character. And we are supposed to stand for what's right, fighting against lawlessness, instead of joining in. If a person makes a practice of sinning, then that person is making a practice of lawlessness, and those who regularly go against God's ways (sin) are living as if there is no standard of righteousness (lawless). John further describes such people as **"children of the devil"**, a little later in 1 John 3:10. The same word for lawlessness is used by Jesus in one of the most terrifying passages in Scripture: **"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness'"** (Matthew 7:21–23). These are people who clearly think they are Christians because of their self-righteousness and self-deception, but Jesus says to them that they are actually workers of lawlessness (anomia). He does not know them, meaning they do not have a saving relationship with Him. Instead of this we want to hear as in Matthew 25:21. 21 His master said to him, **'Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter the joy of your master.'**