

ARE CHRISTIANS “UNDER THE LAW”?

One of the last things any Christian would want to believe is that he is “under the law.” Surely any Christian person knows that “a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law” (Romans 3:28). But does this mean Christians do not have to obey the Ten Commandments?

How many times have you heard people talking about their youth, cheerfully admitting they have at one time or another broken sufficient laws to have landed them in jail?

Some of the most horrible tales have been confessions of having set fire to acres of pine trees, overturned numerous outhouses, and damaging and destroying automobiles and

other property.

For some reason, the statement “the devil made me do it” seems humorous today.

What is this evil part of human nature that makes us want to brag about lawlessness?

What is it about older people that makes them tend to be proud? Some of their youthful days when they were “sowing their wild oats” and engaged in gangland activities, street fights, violent escapades involving vandalism, malicious mischief, and high-speed flights away from uniformed policemen?

What is it in human nature that makes us resent authority?

Do all human beings, almost as if by nature, have secret inner compulsions which make them want to break laws?

A LAWLESS AGE

With the dismantlement of the great

colonial empires following World War II, the world has been dumfounded again and again at some of the macabre revelations of vast purges and genocide which have taken the lives of millions.

Increasingly, government leaders, like the biblical descriptions of “wild beasts” of the gentile nations, are becoming laws unto themselves, brutally ignoring human rights, due process, and international law.

The rise of despotism—that is, the takeover by “strongman” dictators in nation after nation around the world—continues with scarcely a whisper of protest heard in Washington or anywhere else.

“Human rights” are applied on a selective basis with the self-righteous leaders in government decrying the lack of human rights in one country while cheerfully turning their backs on the grisly spectacle of mass murder in another part of the world. In the United States, we are edging closer to

that dangerous period where even neighborhood arguments are often as not settled by shoot-outs.

Teenage gangs wage street war against one another with guns and grenades, and various ultra-nationalistic or fascist organizations cache stockpiles of weapons and ammunition toward that day of revolution (or, as they usually preach, their last-ditch defense against the various real or imagined conspiracies, from Zionists to the “Illuminati,” communism or one of the councils of churches) they say is coming. The world in which you live is a world of violence. Because of the many heartrending abuses of power, many Christian-professing people tend to “throw out the baby with the bath water,” turning away from any and every kind of authority.

We have all seen the comedies portraying southern sheriffs as “rednecks” who mercilessly pistol-whip itinerant blacks, the

sadistic prison guard who beats a helpless inmate, the husky nurse who brutalizes the new patient in the state mental hospital. Hardly a single issue of a daily newspaper is read but that another sensational revelation of such abuse of authority is exposed. From the White House to Congress, from state capitals to the prison systems, from the police to the churches, we know flagrant abuses of government, authority and position are common.

The automatic tendency on the part of those who feel they have just “escaped” such violations of governmental power is to reject all forms of government, all of officialdom. In the midst of all of this, it is quite simple for any professing Christian person who embraces the gentle teachings of Jesus Christ of Nazareth concerning love, forgiveness, faith, and mercy to abandon belief in day-to-day requirements and to live instead as a “free spirit,” blissfully unaware of the

requirement to obey the Ten Commandments!

It is no wonder, then, that millions believe “God is dead,” and other millions who may believe and accept that God is alive seem to imagine that His law is dead.

It’s time you saw from your own Bible, with your own eyes, the real truth about the laws of God and your relationship to them.

WHAT IS GRACE?

One of the terms most often used is “not under law but under GRACE.”

But what is grace? When one is “gracious,” it usually connotes being gentle, kind, and good. Many a parent has named an infant daughter Grace, as one of the virtues of a meek and quiet spirit. But what is the meaning of the word as set forth in the Bible-especially with regard to “not under the law but under grace”?

First, does it mean permission to sin?

“Certainly not!” one might answer. But if it does not mean you have permission to sin, does it mean you do not need to keep God’s laws?

“Well-l-l...that is a different matter,” one might respond.

Perhaps it is time to go to Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary and find out just what grace is.

Grace is “favor, kindness, mercy, etc.” The ecclesiastical usage is “divine mercy or forgiveness.”

Then grace means more than just possessing a kind, good, and gentle spirit; it connotes the favor and mercy of God—divine mercy or being forgiven.

But being forgiven of what?

Why, being forgiven of having sinned!

But, again, how about another definition?

What is sin?

The Bible responds, “Sin is the transgression

of the law” (1 John 3:4).

If that is what sin is—if sin is the breaking of God’s laws—sin is also failing to keep God’s laws!

Technically the word sin from the Hebrew language means “to miss the mark” or “to err.” There are sins of commission and sins of omission. A sin which is “committed” is an act of some sort- which is directly contrary to the Ten Commandments of God or any of the greater magnifications of the Ten Commandments as illustrated by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, as well as by His life and His teaching.

By omitting to do good, you may also be sinning without realizing it! God says, “To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin!”

Sin is not only the breaking of the law of God, but it is also failing to keep the law of God!

When one has broken the laws of God, he is

said to be a “sinner.”

“All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

Every human being has broken God’s holy laws, the Ten Commandments. It is the breaking of these laws, then, as they are applied in principle and as they are magnified by Christ in the New Testament, that constitutes sin (1 John 3:4).

Every one of us has, as part of our basic nature, innate hostility toward God’s laws (Romans 8:7). We have been convicted by God’s law as being guilty of sin: the breaking of His Ten Commandments! When we do this, the penalty the law requires, which is death (Romans 6:23), is applied to us. We are looked upon, from the point of view of God, as being “blood guilty,” and our very lives are expected to be forfeited!

But Jesus Christ of Nazareth died to be a propitiation for our sins, so we don’t have to die and suffer the consequences of our own

illegal and unlawful acts!

Grace is God's mercy: the undeserved, unmerited, and unearned pardon which God grants us upon our acceptance of the shed blood of Jesus Christ, our confession of our personal sins, and our acceptance of Jesus as our personal Savior.

“In whom [Christ] we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace” (Ephesians 1:7).

Grace, then, is God's loving willingness to forgive us of having broken His Ten Commandments, having perpetrated sin!

‘This is very clear in Scripture. Yet millions remain confused.

GRACE BECOMES “PERMISSION”

Even prior to the close of the New Testament writings, God inspired Jude to write, “Beloved, when I gave all diligence to

write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write to you, and exhort you that you should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness [permission to do evil] and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude 3,4).

In order to “turn the grace of God into lasciviousness,” the false teaching must be perpetrated, which implies that God’s goodness, greatness, and forgiveness are so boundless as to virtually encourage a person to live carelessly—living, as it were, in a life of sin—but constantly dwelling on the greatness, goodness, and mercy of God, believing in his heart that he will be forgiven no matter what!

This insidious teaching started before the Bible was even finished.

There were false teachers creeping into the ranks of some of the newly converted gentile converts in such cities as Thyatira, Corinth, and Rome itself who began urging some of the newly converted heathens to revert to some of their age-old customs, which included sex practices as spiritual “rites” in the temple worship of some polytheistic gods, and telling these people that God would bless this activity, that it was not really a sin!

The church in Thyatira was criticized by the glorified Jesus Christ: “...thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols” (Revelation 2:20).

No doubt, there were a number of people in that church congregation who were willing

to follow the false teachings and wicked actions of this prophetess.

Today there are millions and millions of “Christian folk” who, while they would abhor such practices, nevertheless believe in other, more subtle ways that one may live a life of disobedience to God’s perfect Ten Commandments and still be “Christian” in some loose or casual way.

Millions of professing Christians are convinced they should live a “righteous life.” But the guidelines of what constitutes this “righteous life” are usually the guidelines of their own particular part of society. That means their church, club, lodge, social group, immediate or extended family.

Most people are willing to be constrained by the social and religious parameters of life around them while living their lives blissfully unaware of any further requirements to obey God!

To these same people, a “sinful life” would

probably mean indulging in various “worldly” habits and interests such as going to too many or the wrong kind of movies, attending honky-tonks, drinking, gambling, carousing, or “cussing” a little too much. Millions of individuals thus conceive in their own minds a whole way of life that they feel is “Christian,” and, living within the parameters of these social constraints, they feel they are under Christ’s “grace,” and such a state means they are not required to actually obey specific laws! Most professing Christians who have had what they call a “born-again experience” would talk of “living for God,” which means living a good life rather than an evil one. It means, to them, thinking good thoughts rather than evil ones, being honest rather than being dishonest, striving to hold their head up in society, and being thought of by all their friends and constituents as “good.” To many, grace becomes the “state of a

Christian who is living for God”!

Thus grace has subtly been substituted in most people’s consciousness to imply a “condition of the individual” rather than one of the qualities of the mind of God. Instead of coming to understand the real meaning of the word grace as revealed in the Scriptures, many come to feel that grace is a term that only means that a Christian is in a “saved condition.” It means God has smiled on such an individual that he has been called and placed “under grace” and made into a Christian!

But grace is also the undeserved forgiveness Jesus Christ stands ready to lavish upon you if and when you repent of sin!

WHAT IS REPENTANCE?

The apostle Peter, speaking on the Day of Pentecost before thousands in Jerusalem, said, “Repent, and be baptized every one of

you for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).

Later he said, “Repent ye therefore, and be converted” (Acts 3:19).

Jesus began His ministry by commanding people to repent!

“From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, Repent: for the Kingdom of God is at hand” (Matthew 4:17).

Any dictionary can tell you that repent means to be deeply sorry, to be broken up and ashamed of oneself for transgressions and sins! It is not only an emotional experience of contrition, of a state of being deeply sorrowful that a person has done wrong (sinned, erred, made mistakes, and done evil), but the acceptance with the mind of a higher and a better way of life; repentance includes the resolve to do better in the future-not to sin anymore!

When the apostle Peter said to “be converted,” he meant to “be changed”!

This change of which the Bible speaks is not a vague or nebulous change, but a very definite change that God requires in each facet of your private life!

Jesus said, “Except you repent, you shall all likewise perish”?!

When one repents and calls out to God for the forgiveness of sins, he automatically tells God that he intends to obey God’s law henceforth, for repentance means not only being deeply sorry you have sinned but also means turning to obedience!

Sin is the breaking of God’s law. Repenting of sin means being sorry you have broken God’s law. If you are sorry, it means you do not intend to break His law any further!

Let’s illustrate it this way: You live in a society that must be regulated according to various laws. There are federal, state, county, and local laws that regulate practically every act and deed. Whether we are speaking here

of federal laws, civil codes, or simply traffic laws, the same principle applies.

You are required in order to retain your freedom and your citizenship to obey the laws of our country. If you break some of them, it may only require a fine or a very small penalty, or even a warning, and you will be allowed to remain free.

Breaking others can be far more serious.

Grand theft, larceny, arson, robbery, burglary, auto theft, or murder could get you thrown behind bars (notwithstanding the terrible laxity of the courts today).

Let's suppose you have done precisely this:

Maybe, caught up in an emotional state with wrong companions, you perpetrate some act that is clearly against the law. Let's assume you are arrested and, in due time, brought to trial. But, during the trial, just as the judge has imposed upon you a terrific fine which you would never be able to pay, a completely unknown stranger, your benefactor, stands

and says, “Your honor, I believe this man is seriously contrite. I believe he got caught up in the emotion of the moment and was under the influence of some evil companions. I feel he is a man of integrity and wishes truly to mend his ways and live a better life.

“Therefore, I am willing to pay his fine myself so he can go free, and he doesn’t need to pay this penalty!”

Although it probably wouldn’t happen in our society, it does illustrate the point. The judge (as a type of God the Father) would say to the benefactor (who is a type of Jesus Christ and His sacrifice for our own sins),

“That will be fine! You may step up and pay the court, and we will write on the court records that the man who has been accused is free to go.”

Then the judge may look at you, the person who has been arrested, tried, and sentenced, and say, “You are free to go. But don’t ever

get caught up in that kind of a situation again!”

Do you see?

You are required, as a citizen of a free country, to obey its laws, or else!

In the case of God’s divine laws, you are required, whether you know about them or not (ignorance of the law is no excuse), whether you are a Christian, a professing Christian, or whatever, to obey God’s Ten Commandments.

Though people by the millions freely break the Ten Commandments every single day, they are unknowingly coming under the penalty of the law, which is death (Romans 6:23)!

When you repent, you are saying to God you are deeply sorry you have broken His laws. Jesus Christ of Nazareth, as the counsel for the defense, says to God, the Righteous Judge, that He believes in your profession of repentance and is willing to allow His own

sacrifice to be applied in your case!

Then, just as Jesus said to the woman taken in the very act of adultery, God will say the same thing to you: “Neither do I condemn thee; go and sin no more!”

True repentance, then, means being deeply sorry you have broken God’s Ten Commandments, resolving through the power of God’s Holy Spirit and the help of Jesus Christ, your daily High Priest, and Intercessor, not to break the Ten Commandments henceforth.

David experienced some of the depths of the feeling of repentance when he said, “Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin” (Psalm 51:1,2).

When David pleaded for the mercy of God and His forgiveness, he also asked that he

could be cleansed from the penalty of his sins, that his sins could be forgiven and set aside.

In this case, David was pleading for God's grace and His mercy.

He said later, "O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day" (Psalm 119:97).

Never forget that "sin is the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4), and when you totally repent of having sinned, you repent of having broken God's law!

As Paul says, "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God...for sin shall not have dominion over you: for you are not under the law, but under grace" (Romans 6:12-14).

Do you see? A person who has truly repented is sorry he has sinned, meaning sorry he has broken God's law, His Ten

Commandments. He is now determined that with God's help, he will not break those Ten Commandments again! He knows sin will no longer "rule" over him, that the appetites of his own flesh, the wiles of Satan the devil and his influence, and the evil influence of this world all around him will not make him live a life of sin any further! He knows that he is not "under the law" (meaning under the penalty of the law), but is under God's unmerited grace and pardon!

Paul continues to answer a question that might arise in the mind of one who does not know the true meaning of the word grace. He says, "What then? Shall we sin [that is, break the Ten Commandments], because we are not under the law but under grace? God forbid!" (Romans 6:15).

Can you see now? When the Scripture speaks of being "under the law," it means, by its very context, being under the "penalty" of the law!

To obey the law is to be “within the law,” but to sin is to “come under the law.” But there is a simple difference that we can understand by applying the earlier analogy of the courtroom scene.

All of us as free citizens can “stand fast in the freedom wherewith our founding fathers have made us free,” but to do so, it means we must continue to be “law-abiding citizens”!

And what is wrong with that? How many Americans or others do you see living in free nations (such as Britain, Canada, Australia, etc.) who go about complaining every single day concerning the many laws they must keep? I do not speak here of taxes or civil codes, which from time to time may appear to be unjust, but the overriding laws which are not unlike the Ten Commandments. It is against the law to murder, to rape, to rob, to steal, pillage, to burn or vandalize your neighbor’s property, and well it should be!

How many “law-abiding citizens” go about every single day shaking their heads in dismay, arguing in their minds against these constraints? A ridiculous question!

There’s nothing sinister or evil in being a “law-abiding citizen” when we apply it to a country. If you feel as many do, you prize very highly your freedoms granted you by those documents which are virtually on a sacred level called the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, with its amendments.

It is no different with God’s law. Why should any Christians feel as if they are under a horrible burden, like a grinding, heavy weight, to be constrained to obey God’s law? This is tantamount to alleging that the citizens of a free nation such as the United States go about spending their time in doing nothing else except complaining about the terrible yoke of bondage which forces them to avoid burglarizing their neighbor’s

apartment, stealing his automobile, raping his wife, or murdering him!

WHAT'S WRONG WITH GOD'S LAW?

Can you find anything really wrong with God's Ten Commandments? How long has it been since you have read the Ten Commandments? For a refreshing experience, do the following: Turn in your own Bible to Exodus 20 and read the entire chapter slowly.

Read not only the Ten Commandments themselves but even the context in which they were given. Read about the quaking mountain with the magnificent voice of God thundering out the greatest law ever devised to Moses (who was a mediator of the Old Covenant) and the people of Israel!

As you read slowly through the Ten Commandments, continually ask yourself, "What is wrong with these laws?"

Muse for a time on the practical application of the Ten Commandments if they were obeyed in a national sense! As an example, what would happen if the United States of America obeyed any one of the Ten Commandments perfectly?

What about the commandment against murder? It is easy to see if even this one commandment were obeyed, an enormous avalanche of crime would be eradicated from the American scene!

Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount equated hatred, bitter anger, and murderous thoughts with murder itself! Therefore, anyone who is “angry with his brother without a cause” and who would say “drop dead” or “you useless wretch,” has actually broken the spirit and intent of this commandment already!

To break the spirit or intent of the law is to come under the death penalty! Therefore, Jesus Christ, in magnifying the law and

making it “honorable” in the New Testament, makes it far more binding than His contemporaries realized!

Hence, even for a neighbor to be unreasonably angry with his brother means he has already broken God’s Ten Commandments! And to break one is to be guilty of all!

Remember, sin is the “transgression of the law” (or the breaking of the Ten Commandments).

Obeying the law against murder perfectly would mean the eradication of hatred.

Hatred is an emotion very closely associated with fear, ego, vanity, and jealousy.

Any nation whose citizens were in such control of their minds and emotions so as to be without hate would have the following great revolutionary blessings:

1. There would be no crime in the entire nation. Any people completely free from vanity, jealousy, fear, greed, and hatred

would be an honest people, a good and loving people.

2. There would be no racism. Prejudice produces hatred and vice versa. In eradicating hatred and supplanting it with love, which is an outgoing concern (the very opposite feeling of hatred), the nation would also eradicate the last vestige of racism.

That would mean equal opportunities in the economy, in the government, in education, in religion, and in every structure of the society.

Without racism, a wave of peace, love, goodwill, and prosperity would sweep the country—all because a people obeyed just one of the Ten Commandments.

3. All entertainment would have to be revised. Books, papers, novels, magazines, motion pictures, and television would be deeply affected, for if there were no hatred, there could be no violence, and hence there would be peace. Without violence, television

would have to be more informative and educational— it would revolutionize the entire entertainment industry.

4. Religions would have to be totally revolutionized, too. There could be no jealousy, hatred, suspicion, fear, or vituperation. All religion would be deeply changed!

Do you see?

Think of the many other ways in which you could apply the keeping of just this one commandment to modern society, and then think of the many ways in which that society could be improved!

You could apply the same lesson to any of the other commandments, including covetousness. This would wipe out materialism, the vain, egotistical, and greedy search for wealth, ill-gotten gain, and the worshipful attitude of bowing down before “things”! People in our society tend to “use people and love things” when they should

“use things and love people”!

This same experiment could be applied to any one of the Ten Commandments.

But wait!

A commandment which plainly states you ought to keep holy the seventh-day Sabbath, beginning from Friday sunset until Saturday sunset? Now that is another matter!

Frankly, if God had somehow “blue-penciled” His Ten Commandments and made them Nine Commandments with the Fourth deleted, then the entire question of law and grace and all the other theological arguments which tend to obliterate the Ten Commandments of God would never have arisen in the first place!

When you come right down to it, it is the insistent rebellion against the requirement to “observe” a day as being a special holy day to God, sanctified in His sight and for a spiritual and righteous purpose, that seems to gall so many human beings.

To “select” a day in their own minds and hearts, inventing and deriving their own religious customs and pursuits, is well and good. To be righteous enough to “decide” on their own, without any intervention from God, that it would be good for them to observe one day in seven makes many individuals feel quite self-satisfied and righteous in God’s sight.

Their reasoning goes something like this: “It isn’t that I ‘mind’ keeping a day so much; I don’t mind doing it at all. It’s just that I want to keep a day because I love God because it is my desire to serve and to love my God, and not keep a day because He tells me to!”

Though it may be expressed in many different ways, this is an underlying attitude that needs to be understood!

Many people seem to resent being given “orders” from God’s Word and would like the Ten Commandments to be rewritten to

become the “Ten Suggestions”!

If these were only suggestions from God as basic “guidelines” which were “highly recommended,” many more people would probably attempt, haphazardly and halfheartedly, to follow a few of them from time to time.

But commandments? Orders? For God to order you to do something? Now, that is quite a different matter!

This is the crux of the whole problem!

God’s Word says, “For the carnal mind is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Romans 8:7).

God shows that by our very nature, we are rebellious and hostile to God’s law. But there is nothing wrong with the Ten

Commandments, for the apostle Paul said, “Wherefore, the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just and good” (Romans 7:12).

He said, “For we know that the law is

spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin: For that which I do, I don't want to do, and that which I want to do, I do not; and the thing which I hate, that I find myself doing; if then, I do those things I don't want to do, I consent unto the law that it is good"

(Romans 7:14-16, paraphrased).

No, there is nothing "wrong" with the Ten Commandments, but there is a great deal wrong with people which the Ten Commandments point out and which, in turn, make many people feel guilty and uncomfortable. So, instead of facing the law clearly and repenting of what they are doing that is wrong, too many people turn from the mirror of God's Ten Commandments

(which exposes their own personal sins and faults) and go their own way in their own self-righteousness, and refuse to repent!

What about you? Do you believe God's law must be obeyed?

Perhaps you need to come to your own

private decision as to what you will do with the following scriptures: "...if you will enter into life, keep the commandments" (Matthew 19:17).

"For I delight in the law of God after the inward man" (Romans 7:22).

"I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin" (Romans 7:25).

"If you fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, ye do well: But, if ye have respect to persons; ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors. For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty, of all" (James 2:8-10).

"And hereby do we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that sayeth, I know him, and keepeth not his -commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:3,4).

Finally, notice the description of the end-time remnant of the true Church of God at the exact moment of their greatest persecutions, just prior to the Second Coming of Christ.

“And the dragon was wroth with the woman [the Church of God] and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Revelation 12:17).

Don't make the mistake of thinking that obedience to God's law conflicts with grace! Because you are under grace, meaning forgiven (when and if you repent of having broken God's law), you are rejoicing in the great liberty and freedom of having the penalty of death removed from you!

Jesus Christ of Nazareth has stepped forward and asked God the Father if He can shed His own life's blood, giving His own back to the horrible, tearing lash for your

sins!

He bore His cross through the jeering mob, allowed Himself to be bound, spat upon, brutally beaten within an inch of His life, and then staggered and fell under the weight of that huge stake until He felt the spikes driven through His hands and His feet and had Himself hoisted aloft to die for your sins and for mine!

He died because we had broken His law!

When we accept the fact of His death in our stead, it is the most shameful mockery of all of history to pervert the “grace of Jesus Christ” into lasciviousness by arguing we can now break the very law which took Jesus’ life!

No, once we have repented and accepted Christ’s shed blood, He will say to us just as He did the woman, “Go and sin no more”; that is “Go and don’t you ever break those Ten Commandments [in spirit] again!”

But even this is not the end of the story!

In spite of the best intentions of those who have become completely converted, trials and temptations will come. That's why Jesus Christ of Nazareth didn't stay dead!

He is our living Savior, making daily intercession for us. Even though we are under Christ's "grace," we still need His daily intercession when we sin.

"If we say that we have no sin [that we haven't broken His Ten Commandments] we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins [to Him, and to no other], he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:8,9).

You need to praise God that you can be under His grace, meaning that He will forgive and forget your sins if you sincerely repent of having broken God's law!

The bumper sticker says, "Christians aren't perfect, just forgiven!" And that is true, but remember that forgiveness, once ' you

repent, means the removal of all guilt that is past!

There remains today and tomorrow and next year and the rest of your life. And what happens if you slip up? What happens if you weaken?

Satan would like many to believe that they are hopelessly lost because they have let down, dropped out, and gone back into the ways of this world, even after they made an earlier attempt to live a Christian life.

Many of these people want to be forgiven; they want to be cleansed from their sins; they want salvation, eternal life! But they believe the devil's lie that it is too late for them!

No! Jesus Christ is alive today. He is a merciful High Priest who knows your temptations and weaknesses—He overcame sin in the flesh, being tempted in every point like we are—He is able to turn to the Father and say, “Father, I understand. Please forgive

this person!”

If you still want salvation, God the Father stands ready to give it to you. He is not willing that any should perish, and He wants to forgive you!

When you are forgiven, you still need Jesus Christ to help you on a daily basis! Grace means God’s loving pardon, not permission to live in a life of sin!

So repent of having broken God’s laws; think about those wonderful laws that would save nations if they were obeyed, and ask God’s help in keeping them and in making them a part of your daily life!