

The Divine Order: How Grace Leads to Radical Obedience

There's a powerful sequence woven throughout Scripture that transforms how we understand living for God. It's not complicated, but getting the order right makes all the difference between religious striving and Spirit-empowered living.

The sequence is this: **Grace. Faith. Obedience.**

Getting the Order Wrong

In the early church, a group called the Judaizers attempted to reverse this divine order. They taught that Gentile believers needed to start with obedience to Jewish customs and laws, then exercise faith, and maybe—just maybe—God would extend His grace to them. It was obedience, then faith, then grace.

This reversal wasn't just a minor theological disagreement. It struck at the very heart of the gospel message. Even Peter, who had walked with Jesus for three years and was the first to preach grace to the Gentiles, temporarily got caught up in this error. The Judaizers feared that starting with grace would create too much room for people to become passive, neglectful, or even abusive of God's kindness.

But that fear misunderstands what grace actually does in a human heart.

The Transforming Power of Grace

Grace is God's undeserved kindness—His initiative to take away our sins through Jesus' sacrifice, offering us forgiveness and a new life of righteousness. Grace is always God moving toward us first. Scripture tells us that not one person pursues God on their own. Grace originates with Him.

Faith is our response to that grace. It's our full surrender and dependence on God. Salvation begins with faith when we trust the Lord to save us, but faith continues to build throughout our lives as we learn to depend on God to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

Obedience is our willingness to do whatever God directs—not in our own strength or ability, but depending on God's strength and power. Obedience is trust in action. It's our bold steps forward, empowered by the One who called us.

The Apostle Paul captured this perfectly in Galatians 2:20: "My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me."

The Cross: Our Constant Motivation

Paul reminded the Galatian churches about the graphic reality of Jesus' death on the cross. Roman crucifixion was brutal—a person nailed to wood, hanging until they bled out or died from asphyxiation. Jesus didn't die that way because He had nothing better to do. He died that way because it was necessary.

Jesus did for us what we cannot do for ourselves. He lived in perfect obedience to all of God's laws and offered His perfect life in place of our imperfect ones.

When we allow the cross to grip our hearts, it transforms us by giving us ongoing motivation. The crucified Christ constantly compels us to live surrendered, obedient lives. We can never lose sight of the cross.

There's profound wisdom in the recovery movement's foundational confession: "I can't, but God can." This humble recognition runs through half of the twelve steps and echoes Paul's conviction that to live for God, we must maintain this posture: **I've been crucified with Christ. I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.**

Abraham's Example

The life of Abraham beautifully illustrates this divine sequence. In Genesis 12, God initiated blessing for Abraham—pure grace. Abraham had done nothing to earn or deserve it. God simply said, "I'm going to bless you, make your name great, give you an abundant family, and through you, all nations will be blessed."

Then came the faith moment. In Genesis 15, Abraham had to trust God for the promise of family. The problem? Abraham and Sarah were well past normal childbearing years—in their nineties. Yet instead of demanding evidence or explanations, Abraham simply believed God.

Finally, there was radical obedience. God called Abraham to circumcision as the mark of obedience—a theological symbol that these promises wouldn't come through human effort but supernaturally. And yes, this was genuinely radical obedience, especially considering the methods available in Abraham's day.

Galatians 3:6-7 tells us: "In the same way, Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith. The real children of Abraham, then, are those who put their faith in God."

Abraham received right standing with God through faith, not obedience. **Obedience is the fruit, not the root, of a right relationship with God.**

Living by Faithfulness

The prophet Habakkuk declared, "The righteous will live by their faithfulness to God" (Habakkuk 2:4). Notice the progression: those who are made right with God (an act of grace received through faith) will then live by their faithfulness to the Lord.

When you receive grace and exercise faith, becoming a follower of Jesus, the natural flow of living for God means you walk in faithfulness and obedience—even radical obedience—whatever God leads you to do.

When you truly trust God, you do things that seem crazy to the world. People saved by grace don't sit back and indulge in sinful, slothful ways. They live by grace, believing God, risking everything to obey because they know God is good, sufficient, and satisfying.

The Hall of Faith

Hebrews 11, often called the "hall of faith," lists heroes who demonstrated radical obedience. They overthrew kingdoms, shut the mouths of lions, survived martyrs' fires, saw weaknesses turned to strengths, and put armies to flight. Many were oppressed and mistreated, yet they endured with great faithfulness.

The endorsement they received is stunning: "This is why God is not ashamed to be called their God" (Hebrews 11:16).

Let that sink in. Because they walked in radical obedience, **God was not ashamed to be called their God.**

Your Next Step

The question for each of us is simple but searching: Do we ever have moments where we're stretched or have to step out with courage to obey? If not, it's right to question whether we're really living for God.

What is your next bold step of obedience in God's direction?

Maybe it's a step of character—things in your life you know need to change. Perhaps it's recognizing, "God, I can't, but you can."

Maybe it's a step of action—forgiving someone, joining a community, taking that discipleship step you've been avoiding.

Grace never seeks to bench us. Grace wants to put us in the game. Your heavenly Father is begging you to swing away—to take big swings for Him.

The order matters: **Grace. Faith. Obedience.** Get it right, and you'll discover a life of radical trust and Spirit-empowered action that brings glory to God and transforms everything around you.

Scripture References from the Sermon

Explicitly Mentioned or Quoted:

1. **Galatians 2:14** - Paul refers to Judaizers trying to make Gentiles follow Jewish traditions
2. **Galatians 2:19** - "For when I tried to keep the law, it condemned me..."
3. **Galatians 2:20** - "My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me..."
4. **Galatians 3:1** - "Oh, foolish Galatians, who has cast an evil spell on you?..."
5. **Galatians 3:6** - "In the same way, Abraham believed God and God counted him as righteous because of his faith"
6. **Galatians 3:11** - "So it's clear, no one can be made right with God by trying to keep the law"
7. **Genesis 12** - God's grace blessing to Abraham (promise to bless him and make his name great)
8. **Genesis 15** - Abraham's faith experience (believing God for the promise of family)
9. **Genesis 17** - Abraham's radical obedience through circumcision
10. **Habakkuk 2:4** - "The righteous will live by their faithfulness to God"
11. **Hebrews 11** - The "hall of faith" chapter describing heroes of faith
12. **Hebrews 11:16** - "This is why God is not ashamed to be called their God"

Alluded to or Thematically Referenced:

13. **Romans 3:10-11** - Reference to "not one person pursues God first"
14. **Romans 10:13** - "Call upon the name of the Lord and you'll be saved"
15. **Ephesians 2:8-9** - The theme of salvation by grace through faith, not works
16. **Acts 10** - Peter's ministry to Gentiles (referenced in context)
17. **Acts 15** - The Jerusalem Council (referenced regarding Peter's defense of grace)

Relevant Verses Aligned with Main Themes:

- **Titus 2:11-12** - Grace teaches us to live godly lives

- **James 2:17** - Faith without works is dead
- **Philippians 2:12-13** - Work out your salvation with God working in you
- **2 Corinthians 5:17** - New creation in Christ
- **Colossians 1:29** - Laboring with God's energy working powerfully within