

**Thanksgiving:** God is faithful. We can trust Him in faith that He will do what He promised. He does and will do beyond what we can think or imagine. **"And I will lead the blind in a way that they do not know, in paths that they have not known I will guide them. I will turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground. These are the things I do, and I do not forsake them."** (Isa 42:16 ESV)

Please do not forget to pray for all the shut-ins and isolated brothers and sisters in our congregations C. Campbell (Fredericton) and J. Steffes (Caribou, Me), Mr. Ross Bathurst, P. Ward (Saint John) and others.

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### **ACTIVITIES FOR THE MONTH OF FEBRUARY 2020**

Times of worship services: Moncton – 10:30 AM every Sunday

- Time of worship services in **Saint John** – Sunday, **February 9** and **23** at 2:30 PM.
- **Communion**- On 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday – **Moncton**  
and 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday - **Saint John**
- **Address:**
  - Moncton— 70 King St. —Sage building, second floor;
  - Saint John—50 Newport Cres., Portland United church.

**The next Discipleship groups:** to be announced

**Local Website:** Should you have forgotten the password to enter **"For members only"** on the [www.worshipim.ca](http://www.worshipim.ca) website, please do not hesitate to contact Mr. Vautour.

[www.facebook.com/GCIMoncton](https://www.facebook.com/GCIMoncton) - Please note the following: As the bulletin is not done weekly anymore but done on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of every month, articles in the continuing series posted in the bulletin are uploaded to this website every week. It is hoped this will be a help in your personal Bible Studies.

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**Thank you for your prayers** (Jan. 31, 2020) – **The Enkels**, (GCI Saint John) say thank you to all those who sent cards, emails following the death of their great grand daughter who was born prematurely. Thank also for all those prayed for the family during this difficult time. The family "really appreciated this".

**Prayer request from Uganda, Africa.** (Received Jan. 23 on GCI- NB Facebook page). *"I would like to oongraculate GCI **team** for finishing the year 2019 in peace and **saying happy to everyone** across world. We are so much pleased to have great people and friend **world** wide. Today as we commence **2020** allow me to announce into your ears as brothers and sisters in **CHRIST**. We as GCI **Uganda** Isingiro Nakivale Refugee Settlement we started our Church in 2018 July in a community of refugees where we obliged to bring hope to the victims of war. However we managed set up a church of which has not been due to the limited resources. Therefore we come before you for any possible assistance be material, Financially, prayers all are good before our GOD as our mission is to share the gospel in its fullness. we are over 140 believers". (He was told that we were not able to help financially but that we would pray for them).*

**Prayers for GCI across the world:** that we will walk in God's will for us and that we will see, understand and participate in his work as He guides the leadership, Mr. Williams, GCI Director, Mr. Bill Hall, Canadian Director and all the others in leadership wherever they may be.

**Please pray for God's will to be done on earth as in heaven (Matt 6).** There are so many troubled spots in this world, too many to enumerate.

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### **Where do you turn when you are feeling hopeless?**

There have been a number of times in my life when I felt hopeless. The first time I remember was when I was 12 and two of my sisters were killed in a car accident. My family and I were in New York, miles from home, when this tragedy struck. I was shocked and confused and didn't know where to turn. It wasn't until we returned home and went back to church that I started healing as friends and church members surrounded our family with love and support.

Over the years I've lost three other siblings and both parents—and some of those losses gave me a sense of hopelessness, angst, fear and even anger. Other members of my immediate family went through the same sense of grief, and I was doing my best to provide comfort to them. It was my church family that gave me comfort and support and helped me through those feelings of hopelessness. Recently I faced a rather intensive surgery. This time, right alongside my immediate family, my church family stepped up and helped provide just what I needed.

This is what a church family is for—to give hope to people by continually keeping the source of our hope—Jesus—the center of the center. All of us go through periods of feeling hopeless. It may be something we are going through on a personal level, a corporate level, or even a national level. I clearly remember the churches being crowded the weeks after the US was attacked on 9/11. People felt vulnerable and confused and they went to the one place they believed gave reasons for the hope that is in us. That place was the church; there many cried for comfort, encouragement, and to have their hope restored.

We refer to churches as places of worship. Who do we worship? The One who gives us hope—the hope of forgiveness, the hope of justification, the hope of being noticed, the hope of being included, the hope of something better than what we have right now. We also refer to churches as houses of prayer—where we seek relationship with Father, Son and Spirit, and with each other. Why do we seek that relationship? Because of hope. We hope that relationship provides answers to our deepest questions, provides peace that surpasses understanding, and provides love and acceptance.

In GCI, our emphasis is on healthy churches. Sadly, some churches don't give a message of hope. You are hardly greeted when you come through the door. The music doesn't lift or inspire because you've never even heard the songs. The sermon leaves you feeling a bit lost because you have no idea what it was about, or worse, you leave feeling guilty because the message made you feel you aren't good enough. Little is said about Jesus, the offertory seems to be center stage, and the place clears out as soon as the service ends. This is not a church focused on hope.

Healthy GCI churches are hospitals for people looking for spiritual help. They are centers of hope where people can find relationship, understanding, compassion, and the truth of a God who loves you just the way you are. They are lights on a hill, illuminating paths to Jesus, where those without hope can find what they need most.

In a healthy church worship planning is intentional and always keeps guests in mind. Greeters (hosts) are looking to connect with visitors. Sermons are inspirational because they are focused on Jesus and the good news of the Gospel. Building relationship is central to a healthy church's existence. In a healthy church hope is central and God is worshipped.

Diving deeper into the Hope Avenue (venue) will be one of two themes for *Equipper* in 2020. Our second theme is to bring focus and clarity to the GCI Worship Calendar, where we acknowledge, through worship, preaching, and living, that Jesus is the center of the center. A healthy church is a church where hope is found. Let's be healthy churches.  
Rick Shallenberger

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### **The Message of Jesus: A Simple Matter of Trust**

*(From <https://www.gci.org/articles/a-simple-matter-of-trust/>)*

How can you be sure you are in the kingdom of God and not destined for the lake of fire? Many Christians worry that in the final analysis, they might not be counted among the children of God and will face their fate in the destruction of the lake that burns with fire and brimstone (**Revelation 20:8**).

What is the basis for such a worry? Personal sins, of course. Deep inside, we know how ugly and real our sins are and continue to be, and we fear that since God knows it too, there is no way he will "let us in" his kingdom. After all, we know that God is pure and holy, and that his kingdom is also pure and holy.

So where does that leave us? Well, since we are not "pure and holy," we figure it can only leave us on the outside looking in. We want to overcome. We struggle to overcome. We pray against our sins. We set our wills against our sins. But when all is said and done, we never do quite get rid of them. We are sinners, and as such, we keep on sinning.

"You can't play games with God," we are told. "Christ didn't die for you so you could keep right on sinning," we are warned. We listen to the Ten Points for Overcoming Sin sermons, the Five Rules for Ruling Your Emotions sermons, the Nine Keys for Healthy Happy Families sermons, the Seven Laws of Success sermons. On and on and on they come, the never-ending stream of "Get Your Life Straightened Out or Burn" messages.

We take notes feverishly, we pin them up on the fridge, we pray over them, we try and we try, yet, when the chips are down, we blow it, confronted once again with the stark truth that we are what we are, and what we are stinks.

"Don't kid yourself," the little voice in the back of your mind whispers. "You're a loser. If you think God is going to give anything good to you, you must be in dreamland, pal." So where does our loser life leave us with God? Why should he keep putting up with us? And why should he let us into his pure and holy kingdom?

#### **Bad information**

Somewhere along the line, Christians have given other Christians bad information about how this kingdom of God thing works. The kind of thinking I have been talking about above does not come from the Bible. It comes from ugly rumors and twisted tales about God, making him out to be rather more like one of us than the way the Bible says he really is.

The Bible says God is on your side, even though you are a sinner. That's right. Even though you are a sinner.

Don't ever forget this: Christ died for you while you were still a sinner (**Romans 5:8**).

Contrary to what you may have heard and may have thought, the Bible is not primarily a rule book, though it does contain plenty of good instruction about how humans ought to live. No, the Bible is not first and foremost, as you may have heard, "God's instruction manual for humans," which if you don't heed and obey, God will hurl you kicking and screaming and gnashing your teeth into his supernatural furnace. Quite the contrary, the Bible is good news, and it is good news for you just as it is for everybody who has ever lived—not merely good news if you straighten up, but pure and simple good news no matter what you have done or do or will do.

In Christ, God has chosen to reconcile nothing less than his whole creation to himself, and he didn't even ask your permission to do it (**1 John 2:2; John 12:32; Romans 8:21; Colossians 1:20**). In personal terms, in Christ, God has reconciled you to himself, and he didn't even bother to check your credit first. You have been reconciled, like it or not, and the only question left is whether you will trust him that it is so, and enjoy it, and start seeing yourself the way you really are—the way God has made you in Christ—or just keep on seeing yourself the way you always have, through your own dirty, cracked and crooked lenses.

The Bible is the record of God's work of grace through which he has redeemed the world through his Son Jesus Christ (**Luke 24:45-47**). When you read the Bible, you are reading about a world of people who need redemption, and whom God has in fact redeemed through the birth, life, death and resurrection of his Son, God with us, God in the flesh, God in death and God in resurrection, Jesus Christ (**John 3:17; 5:46; 1 Corinthians 15:3; 1 Timothy 2:4-6**).

God holds you as you really are, the way you were always meant to be, in Christ, and what the Word and the Spirit say you are, that is precisely what you actually are, for it is only in God that we exist at all (**Acts 17:28**).

And God says that you, as you are held in Christ, which is the only way you exist at all, are good (**Romans 6:11, 23; 8:2; 1 Corinthians 1:30; 2 Corinthians 1:21; 5:17; 17-19**). You, as you are in Christ, are God's beloved son

(males and females alike) in whom he is well pleased. That is true, whether you want to believe it or not. It is true precisely because God says it is, and what God says is, is.

#### **No strings attached**

So what room is there for worry about our salvation? There is no room for worry. Remember, it is for Christ's sake that we are accounted worthy before God. Without Christ, we are dead meat. With him, we are full members of God's family. When he touched the rotting corpse of our loser life, he healed it completely and made us his own. He made us, in him, the beloved children of God (**John 1:12; Galatians 3:26**). Being "good" doesn't cut it—never did and never will. There is only one ticket into the kingdom of God—trusting in Jesus Christ.

The kingdom of God is free, absolutely free, with no strings attached. You enter it by trusting God to give it to you. You cannot get in with spiritual merit badges. You cannot buy a ticket. All you can do is walk right through the front door by trusting the Giver of the gift to do exactly what he promised—to give you his kingdom (**Luke 12:32; Galatians 2:16**).

You don't have to worry about the cost; it has already been paid (**Romans 5:9; Revelation 1:5**). You don't have to worry about how to dress; he will give you an outfit. You don't have to worry about what to say or do when you get inside; he will show you. You don't have to be anybody special, do anything special, pass any test, fit any profile or win any drawing.

It's free. God wants you there. The invitation is platinum-plated real, from God himself. And yes, he knows you are a rat. He took care of that. To him (and he is the One who decides), you are in fact not a rat any more, even though he knows you still act like one. "In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins" (**1 John 4:10**, New Revised Standard Version throughout).

The initiative in all this is God's, not ours. It depends on him, not on us. He is the author and the finisher of our faith (**Hebrews 12:2**). Our part is to believe and accept, and that's it. This is not a "Thanks for everything, Jesus. I'll take it from here" arrangement. No, it is only Jesus, Son of the Father Almighty, with no help from us, from start to finish. You can take it or you can leave it, but there is not one thing you can add to it. If you try, you'll wind up like the fool who sneaked into the banquet wearing his own filthy rags instead of the free wedding garment provided by the King (**Matthew 22:12**).

"But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us" (**Romans 5:8**). "Trust me," God says. "You're in. You don't have to do anything except trust me. The wedding banquet of the Lamb is totally free to you. I have already paid the bill. Now it is time to celebrate. Come on in. Don't bring anything. Everything is provided."

#### **It's still about grace**

By now, some Christians are very angry with me. "You are taking this grace thing too far," they are thinking. "God wants a changed life, not just some easy believism. God is not going to just let in anybody who believes. These sinners have got to prove the genuineness of their belief by living right."

They mean, of course, prove it by living right to the satisfaction of the "godly" people in the church, namely them, because sinners certainly have nothing to prove to God. Jesus died for sinners while they were still sinners. He knows what sinners we are, and he also knows what sinners the "you're taking this grace thing too far" people are. That is why we all need grace. It is why the Son of God died for us, and it is why salvation comes by grace. Regardless of our neurotic need to vindicate ourselves, we are sinners, and left to ourselves, we have no hope. Even if salvation were based on performance, which it isn't, our little doodle-bug mound of righteousness could never begin to measure up to our Himalayan mountain range of sinfulness.

Still, we don't like to admit that we are dead to sin. We desperately look for ways to feel that we are not quite as bad as we really are. After all, we don't blow up at our family every day. We don't look at pornography all the time. We don't gossip in every conversation. We aren't really bad persons, we just slipped up under pressure. We aren't really liars, we just shaded the truth a little. We only envy certain people. We are only greedy about some things. We are only inconsiderate, or selfish, or rude, or arrogant, or mean, or callous or pigheaded (et cetera ad infinitum on and on) sometimes.

But when it comes to the sins of others, now that's a different matter entirely. There are some sins that we holy righteous folk just cannot and will not abide. Today it is especially vogue not to abide "those people" who get abortions, "those" homosexuals and "those" fornicators. Well, on second thought, it seems we can abide the fornicators a whole lot better than we can abide the homosexuals.

Of course, our holy intolerance for certain kinds of sinners whom we find more disgusting than ourselves extends to most anybody who does most anything that we don't like. We want rules for others, to keep them in line, and we even want rules for ourselves, to keep us in line (as long as we can keep secret our breaking of them). We feel we have got to find a way not to be as bad as we suspect we might be, and keeping some rules and doing some good deeds are great ways to make ourselves feel that we are not as big a sinner as we really are.

We have such a hard time accepting and admitting that we are hopeless sinners who could never climb out of the sin pit in a million years. We are dead to sin, pure and simple, but we keep telling ourselves, to placate our consciences, that we can somehow, someday, actually put all this sin out of our lives.

It ain't gonna happen, neighbor. Work at it all you want, as hard as you want, and you will still be in the sin pit on the day you die. The only thing that will get you out of it is being raised with Christ, and that has already happened (**John 5:25; Colossians 1:13-14; 3:1; Romans 6:11**). But you can't live like it and enjoy the fruit of it if you refuse to believe it.

The only thing that matters is trusting God that his word is true—for Christ's sake he has erased all sin, including yours, and removed every record of your guilt forever. He has officially declared you not guilty, free to go, and he has closed the courthouse. You can believe that, you can trust him, you can lay down your burden and take your rest in him (**Matthew 11:28-30**).

Or, of course, if you are hell-bent on it, you can go right on trying to prove yourself worth saving by striving in all the typical ways to make yourself a better person. (That makes it easier for you to condemn others, too.) If you like that kind of life, you can have it. God will grieve for you, but he gives you the freedom to choose to be a fool, if you want it.

### **Faith is not a work**

At this point there is something important that we need to say about faith, too. You are not saved by faith, but by God's grace. That means God is not even measuring the quality and quantity of your faith. You are not saved by trusting in your faith; you are saved by God for Jesus' sake. You are saved because God loves you and because he is good, not because you have faith. Faith comes in so that you can actually believe that what God says is true and actually enjoy the gift you have already been given.

There is no earning, no merit, in your trust. Don't think faith is the price tag of salvation. It is not. Faith is simply trusting God that his gift to you, which is still invisible in the tangible world, is in fact more real than anything you can physically touch or see and is really yours just because he says so. You can receive it or refuse it; either way, it is no less real, and it is no less a free gift. Faith simply enables you to enjoy the gift he has given you.

You don't have to have some certain kind of faith. You don't have to have some emotional experience. You don't have to feel an overwhelmingly deep love, or intense remorse, a surge of power or a wave of peace. You don't need anything at all. Just trust God. Just believe him.

Faith means belief. It doesn't mean breathless, tearful, supercommitment. It just means believe God and quit worrying about whether you are going to "make it into the kingdom"—you already have (**Romans 5:1**). Christ has qualified us (**Colossians 1:12**).

### **Receiving the gift**

No analogy is perfect, but let's pretend for a minute that someone you have heard is trustworthy walks up to you and hands you a check for a million dollars. He tells you that it is a gift, no strings attached, and that it is all yours. Now, you can either believe the benefactor and take the check straight to the bank and deposit it in your account, or you can figure he is a nut and throw the check in the trash. I suppose you could even decide that you'd rather make your own money and haughtily refuse to take his charity. You could even spit in his eye if you felt especially offended by his generosity, especially if his gift offended your sense of personal dignity by making it look like you were a loser who actually needed the money.

But to get to the point, when your benefactor hands you the check with your name on it, you don't have to dance a jig to make it actually become yours. You don't have to go to his house and wash his windows. You don't have to start pleading with him to forgive all the financial mistakes you have made in your life and shed tears. You don't have to do anything. A hearty thank you would be nice, but you already have the check. It is yours. All that is left to do is to believe that the benefactor wasn't lying and that the check is good, and in that belief, take it to the bank and deposit it in your account.

God has forgiven your sins and given you a ticket to his kingdom. If he were to wait to see if you would believe before he decided to give you the gift, then it would no longer be a gift; it would be a reward for the act of believing. But that is not how God works it.

Our faith does not affect one way or the other whether God gives us the gift. He has already given it. The only thing faith affects is whether we can enjoy the gift we have already been given. We can let it sit unused and unenjoyed, or we can pick it up and embrace it and kiss it and laugh and enjoy it to the hilt, praising and thanking him forever. Either way, it is still ours, given to us by God absolutely free with no strings attached and no requirements at all.

### **Once and for all**

We do not have to ride the never-ending merry-go-round of trying to strain up enough faith or work up enough good deeds, or overcome enough sins in order to induce the God of our nightmares to finally say “Yes” to us in the judgment. We couldn’t pay for this gift if we lived a million lifetimes. It is a gift.

Imagine a man thinking that he can make the Pacific Ocean wetter by adding a thimbleful of water to it and you have a small idea of how realistic it is to think we could actually bring anything to the table to sweeten the deal. (Actually, on second thought, it might be more like adding a thimbleful of arsenic to the Pacific Ocean, but let’s not quibble over the relative quality of our good deeds.)

The Father of Jesus is not the God of the rumor mill, the God of our nightmares, who makes his list and checks it twice to see if we’ve been naughty or nice. The Father of Jesus is the God of pure grace. He is the One who dealt with all human sin, once and for all, through the Messiah Jesus who redeemed Israel and the whole world from sin through his own death and resurrection. “Believe in me and live,” he says. “Get off the merry-go-round. It’s not getting you anywhere but deeper in the hole.”

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life” (**Ephesians 2:8-10**).

#### **New in Christ**

You can’t get salvation by works. We all at least give lip service to that. So why do we keep acting like we can? Why do we keep worrying we may have lost salvation every time we sin? Salvation does not come by works. It comes purely by grace, and we can pick it up and drink it down and enjoy it forever if we simply trust God, who justifies, guess who, the ungodly (**Romans 4:5**).

He has made us righteous his way, in Christ, not our way, by our latest set of good deeds. The good works we are created for? They are good works in Jesus Christ. They are not our good works. We are what he has made us. He has made us something we were not before—he has made us new creatures in Christ.

We are strengthened in our inner being with power through his Spirit (**Ephesians 3:16**). Christ dwells in our hearts through faith (v. 17), not in ways that are open and obvious. He himself works within us to do anything and everything of worth and value (v. 20). He makes us what we really are in him, God’s own children, and that in spite of ourselves. Remember, he justifies the ungodly, and ungodly is all we would ever be without him.

#### **Confident about the judgment**

John writes about having confidence in the judgment (**1 John 4:17**). So, what do we need to do to be confident about the judgment? Only to believe the promise of God (5:1, 5)! Only to trust the Lord both to save us and to give us his righteousness in Christ (**Romans 3:21-26**). Only to give him our fears and anxieties and rest in his sure word. Peter wrote: “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you” (**1 Peter 5:7**).

And care for us he does. Paul described in **Romans 8:32-35** the unshakable faithfulness God has for us: “He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (v. 39).

“If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (**1 John 1:9**). When we confess our sins we are acknowledging that we are sinners in need of Christ’s righteousness. Why confess such a need unless we trust him to forgive and cleanse, unless we believe him, unless we joyfully accept his free grace?

Confession itself merits us nothing, of course. It is merely a means of expressing trust in God who has already freely forgiven sinners for the sake of his Son. It is the means by which we actually pick up the free gift of forgiveness and take it home with us. It is like the tax collector and the Pharisee in the parable who went into the temple to pray (**Luke 18:10**). The Pharisee prayed about all the good things he was doing, but the tax collector said, “Father be merciful to me, a sinner.” Jesus said the tax-collecting sinner went away clean.

Do you see what is happening? The law-abiding Pharisee was seeking purity in the things he could do. But there is only one who is pure—Jesus Christ. The only way to be pure is to be in Christ, and to be in Christ is God’s gift, freely given to anybody who trusts him for it.

The tax collector trusted God for mercy and got it. The Pharisee didn’t need to trust God for mercy, he figured, because his deeds were, he believed, already pure. He did not, he figured, need to stand in the beggars’ line for mercy with the likes of the tax collector. So, he wouldn’t receive from God what God has, through Christ, already done for him.

We cannot be pure by acting pure. We cannot be pure by acting impure. We can be pure only by trusting in God who saves sinners. The only thing a person has to be to get into the kingdom of God is a sinner (and everybody is a sinner) who trusts God to wipe the record clean.

God says he has already done that in Christ (**1 John 2:2**). God says cleansed sinners have Christ's righteousness attributed to them. God says, "Trust me. It's taken care of. You don't need to justify yourself. You don't need to punish yourself. You don't need to qualify. You don't need to clean up your act. Just trust me. I have taken care of everything. Trust me."

Righteousness does not come by trying to be good (you are not and cannot be good by trying). Righteousness comes by believing the word of God, which declares you righteous for the sake of Christ, who became sin for us all, so that sin could be defeated and our wickedness fixed.

Whatever Jesus takes upon himself gets sanctified, cleansed and saved. He took our sinful wicked minds on himself. That is how we get fixed—not by trying real hard to be good. We can believe it and begin living in the joy of the light, or we can scoff at it and keep right on being miserable sourpusses wallowing in the dark.

Either way, it has been done for us without our help. The heart that has some inkling of how desperate is its need is the heart that is inclined to seize the truth. The gospel is not good news for good, decent folks; it is good news for wretched sinners.

People who consider themselves good, decent folks are not inclined to stand in the soup line for free salvation next to rag-tag spiritual underachievers. They prefer the special entrance for the spiritually well-to-do who have properly purchased tickets in the special VIP section. Only one problem: Their tickets are frauds, and at this banquet, everybody sits in the VIP section.

#### **God at work**

Believe it or not, we can trust God to transform us into the image of Christ. It is the Holy Spirit who does the sanctifying work of chiseling off the lifetime of sinful habits and attitudes and thinking, not us. It is the Spirit who transforms us from the inside out (**Romans 8:11**). Some of that is painful and hard, but it is also liberating and joyous and exciting, because through it we come to know and love Christ more intimately and look forward to his appearing with greater anticipation and hope. It is Christ who brings our lives into harmony with the reason we were created, to bring glory to God, to love him and, in him, to love the fellow humans he created.

In case you haven't noticed, even after we come to faith in Christ, we still struggle with sin. But what the gospel declares to us is that we do not ever have to fear that we "might not make it." There is no need to worry that we don't "measure up." We can rely on the Word of God. We can believe the promise.

We can accept God's love and rest in his Word with the assurance that we are saved from our sins, that we belong to him and that he won't lose us (**Romans 8:1**). We can rest in his promise that in Christ we stand with God right now, and that we will continue to stand with him when Christ comes.

We can rest securely in his love, knowing that we are forgiven, and that even though we still often lose our struggles with sin, our saved condition in Christ with God is never in jeopardy, because Christ and Christ alone is both the Author and the Finisher of our faith (**Hebrews 12:2**).

That is why Jesus, who knows all about such things, calls this stuff good news. Because it is. And that is why this cannot be said enough: Don't let anyone deceive you into thinking that the gospel spells doom for you because you haven't cleaned up your act. They haven't cleaned up theirs either, but that's not the point. The point is this: Jesus Christ came to save sinners, and Sinners R Us. Believe it; it's the gospel truth.

#### **One more thing**

There is one more thing we need to discuss. You have probably heard someone say something like this: Jesus died for your past sins, not for your future sins. Wrong! Jesus died for all sins—past, present and future.

Remember, when you are in Christ, God does not even count your sins against you (**Romans 4:6-8; 8:1**). Now does that sound so antinomian, so law-doing-away-with, that you can't swallow it? Does such talk make you afraid that people might run out and sin all they can and not worry about their salvation? If it does, you are not alone.

The notion of such powerful and absolute grace as God declares he gives to everyone who trusts him simply scares us silly. It runs so counter to all our notions about just desserts and fairness and plain old common decency that we just can't bear to see it in all its naked glory. We feel we just have to tone it down a little or it will get completely out of hand.

Two things must be said. First, this unvarnished, raw and universal grace is real; it is God's own grace; and it is already a fait accompli. So whether it bugs the daylights out of you or not, you might as well get used to it, because there is no other ball game in town.

Second, you really don't need to worry that people who simply trust God for pure and complete pardon for sins past, sins present and sins future will run out and sin all they can, because it simply does not work like that. (We have more to say about repentance in [another article](#).)

Consider this: Does knowing that God has forgiven your sins through the blood of Jesus make you want to run out and sin all you can? I doubt it. When you are in Christ, you hate sin, and even though you still do it, you hate the fact that you still do it. The last thing on your mind is to "sin all you can." In fact, when you are feeling close intimacy with God, you cannot even fathom the idea of sinning at all, much less running out and sinning all you can.

Of course, we do not often feel such close intimacy with God, and sin still deceives us and slays us, as Paul put it, but even so, we do not view God's grace as license to sin—that simply is not how it works. Sin is a disaster. It creates havoc and ruin. It hurts and destroys. And when we sin, to one degree or another, we and those around us suffer the physical and emotional consequences of our sins. But, by the grace of God through Jesus Christ our Lord, we do not and will not lose the gift of salvation because of our sins.

Through Christ, the Son of God become human for our sakes, slain from the foundation of the world, God has dealt completely with all human sin, taking it upon himself and destroying it forever through his birth, life, death and resurrection. God did not save us so that we can continue to sin, but he is not an old fool. He knows we still sin. He does not condone sin. Sin amounts to a betrayal of his love, and he is grieved by our sins.

Still, he loves us so much that he sent his Son to save us from sin and death, and indeed, he saves us absolutely and completely. So even though sin is still present, it does not have the upper hand; we will not die in our sins, we will live forever through Jesus Christ our Lord.

#### **Faith not sight**

Christ said everything has been taken care of. But it doesn't take much looking around to see that things don't look very taken care of just yet, not in our lives, not in the church, and not in the world. That is why we live by faith, and not by sight.

We trust God that he has indeed taken care of our sins, even though we still grind through them, and that he has indeed taken care of every bad thing in the world, every injustice, every wrong, every hatred, every pain, fear, terror and trauma—even though these things still exert real influence in the world for the time being.

In Christ's death and resurrection, all things, all things, are fixed, made right, cleansed, purified and reconciled. We still suffer the consequences of sin, our own and those of others. Yet, in faith, taking God at his word, we know two things: 1) Because we are in Christ, our salvation is never in jeopardy; and 2) We are completely safe and secure in God's hands.

He is always with us, in good times and bad, in our successes and in our pain, in our failures and in our tragedies. Nothing, not even our sins, can ever separate us from God. So when we walk through our dark times, whether times of stress, pain, sorrow, tragedy, grief or just plain guilt of sin, remember that our crucified and risen Savior walks with us.

He feels our pain and grieves with us, and he will never leave us; he will never forsake us. Everything is indeed all right, even though our night is awfully dark and cold right now. But the eternal dawn will come, and when it does, and we at last see all things as they really are in Christ, our joy and peace in the Truth of God, the consummation of all our hope, will overflow forever like a thousand Niagaras.

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