

# THE PRIORITY OF APPLICATION

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**KEN MELLINGER**

*"Compelled by grace, believers grow in the knowledge of God, obey Christ's commands, walk by the Spirit, mortify sin, and pursue God's priorities and purposes."*

*(The Sovereign Grace Statement of Faith, "Life in Christ")*

*"Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ." (Col. 1:28)*

What is your purpose in life? How will you live? *The Westminster Shorter Catechism* (1647) wonderfully begins this way:

Q1: What is the chief end of man?

A1: Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever.

To glorify God means you are growing in Christlikeness. Your aim is maturity. The Christian life is the very best life to live. No wealth or possession or even a sin that persistently tempts you can compare with the life that is yours in Jesus Christ. The benefits are endless, and you have Jesus himself as Savior, Lord, and friend. One day you shall see him as he is and be like him. This is our glorious hope! What a day that will be.

However, between today and that day, we have challenges. The Christian life is simple, but it isn't easy. We have persistent enemies like the world, the flesh, and the devil. The Bible describes our life in Christ as a walk (Rom. 6:4), a race (1 Cor. 9:24), a fight (2 Tim. 4:7), a farmer's work (Gal. 6:9), and a soldier's warfare (2 Tim. 2:3). All require effort for success. So how can we become mature?

The path to maturity runs through obedience as we apply the Scriptures in our hearts and lives. "Scripture alone is our supreme and final authority and the rule of faith and life."<sup>1</sup> This calls for us to hear the Word and apply the Word in our lives. Such application has been a value in Sovereign Grace Churches from the very beginning.

Our *Statement of Faith* describes the reality of our growth in Jesus Christ. The necessity and priority of application are stated this way: "Compelled by grace, believers grow in the knowledge of God, obey Christ's commands, walk by the Spirit, mortify sin, and pursue God's priorities and purposes."<sup>2</sup>

Let's reflect briefly on each of the phrases in this important sentence.

### **"Compelled by Grace"**

The Christian life begins by grace, and we are sustained by grace. Grace is rightly defined as the unmerited favor of God toward man. Grace is described as amazing by John Newton in the hymn "Amazing Grace" because it has not been and cannot be earned by its recipients. Titus 2:11-12 helps us see grace is not a thing or an impersonal force but is a person: "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age."

In short, Jesus has appeared, saved us, and trains us to hate sin and live godly lives. This is maturity. The grace of God and the love of God meet in the person and work of Jesus Christ. John Stott says, "Grace is love that cares and stoops and rescues."<sup>3</sup>

God loves us, and when we see, know, and feel his rescuing care for us at

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1. STATEMENT OF FAITH, "THE SCRIPTURES."

2. STATEMENT OF FAITH, "LIFE IN CHRIST."

3. JOHN STOTT, *CHRIST THE CONTROVERSALIST: A STUDY IN SOME ESSENTIALS OF EVANGELICAL RELIGION* (CAROL STREAM: TYNDALE, 1970), 214.

the cross, our lives are radically changed for the glory of God. We respond to grace by pursuing maturity.

### **"Believers grow in the knowledge of God"**

It has been said that the most important thing about us is what comes into our minds when we think about God. Do you know God as merciful, gracious, faithful, abounding in steadfast love, patient and kind, gentle and lowly? Or do you think of God as harsh and frustrated with you?

One way to grow in our knowledge of God is to read the four gospels and become familiar with Jesus. Note well his response to sinners. Jesus always desires the very best for us.

### **"Obey Christ's commands"**

As we grow in our knowledge of God, our love for God will flourish. Because love conquered us, we find an increasing desire to obey the commandments of God. As disciples, we love obedience because we love Jesus. "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15).

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It is a happy thing for us that the commands of God are not wearisome or heavy burdens. God is for us, not against us, and obedience bears wonderful fruit.

### **"Walk by the Spirit"**

This is the next phrase in the *Statement of Faith*. To walk by the Spirit means we live our lives responding to the desires of the Holy Spirit and not our old sinful nature. The Spirit points us to Jesus and gives us the gift of assurance that we are the children of God. As a result, we desire to walk in humility, gentleness, patience, love, and we bear other fruit of the Spirit in increasing measure. We live under the control and guidance of another.

### **"Mortify sin"**

To put it positively, we seek the things that are above and set our minds on

things that are above. Negatively, we put to death what is earthly in us. This means we die to pride, selfishness, sexual immorality, and covetousness. We put off ungodliness, and we put on godliness.

Jesus tells us it is better to put sin to death than enter hell (Matt. 5:29), so we take serious steps to kill sin. We are not morbidly introspective, but we do well to pay attention to our responses to the heat of life. It is also wise to consider things we ought to be doing but are not doing in applying the Word to our lives. Consider one area where God would have you grow toward maturity.

### **"Pursue God's Priorities and Purposes"**

Among the purposes of God is his commitment to building his church.

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never in vain.*

Therefore, we serve the purpose of God by being actively involved in our local church. We hear the whole counsel of God preached, observe sacraments, and love others by practicing the "one anothers" of the New Testament.

Pray for your pastors. Serve willingly. Proclaim Jesus to others, help them grow in maturity, and as you do, you

will discover you maturing. The promise of God is that in Christ, our labor is never in vain. "Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain" (1 Cor. 15:58).

### **The Irreplaceable Role of Conviction**

One final thought: Underlying all these things and critical to our growth is the role of conviction. The stronger our convictions, the deeper our maturity. Author Jerry Bridges explains: "A conviction is a determinative belief: something you believe so strongly that it affects the way you live. Someone has observed that a belief is what you hold, but a conviction is what holds you. You may live contrary to what you believe, but you cannot live contrary

to your convictions."<sup>4</sup>

Oh, how we need conviction in our life to grow in maturity! We need a determined belief that Christ is worthy of our lives. We need a settled conviction that there is joy in obedience, danger in sin, power in the Spirit, and hope for change in the gospel.

We are not yet what we will be, but let's press onward together toward the goal for the prize. To God be all the glory for the fruit of his grace in our lives. Onward!

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4. JERRY BRIDGES, *THE DISCIPLINES OF GRACE* (COLORADO SPRING, CO: NAVPRESS, 1994), 162-163.

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## **KEN MELLINGER**

Ken Mellinger is an elder at [Living Hope Church](#) (Middletown, PA) and is the chairman of the Sovereign Grace Executive Committee.