

Living by Faith in Future Grace - Lesson 2

by John Piper

Faith is not just a past experience, but a future-oriented trust in the power of God to bless us with all that we need.

Duration: 38:31

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Acts 26:18, Romans 9:32, 1 Thessalonians 1:3

Topics: "Future Grace", "Sanctification"

Description

In this sermon by Pastor John Piper, he discusses the foundations of sanctifying power and the importance of grace in the Christian life. He emphasizes that grace is not just a past event, but something that is needed in the present and future as well. Piper references biblical texts such as 1 Corinthians 15:10 and Hebrews 13:25 to support his argument. He also addresses the doubts and struggles of a person who feels incapable of living the Christian life, highlighting the need for the Holy Spirit to reveal the meaning of future grace.

Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from Desiring God is available at www.desiringgod.org We have arrived in our course at point number two. There are four points total.

So we are now at point number two. Is it biblical? The foundations of sanctifying power. So I have said numerous things that need biblical argument and biblical support.

And I want to try to get through these. I know that the most helpful thing in this class is number four. I know that.

Anxiety, covetousness, lust, bitterness, impatience. In other words, applying the theology to the everyday struggles that we all have is where things like to begin to go on and people get most practical help. But frankly, if I don't lay the foundation of number two, especially, I may be able to make you feel real good that we talked about relevant things, but in a year when the pressure is really on and somebody has really abused you, really harmed you, maybe the foundations won't be there for learning how to live by faith in future grace at that moment.

We've got to have our foundations really, really deep. This may sound self-aggrandizing, but it so blew me away, and I will try to say it in such a way that God gets the glory, and if it doesn't sound that way, I'll just

take the risk. But as I went into the hospital room today, this is a family who's been at our church since May.

They're not members yet. They, in a very painful way, had to leave a former church. They have come up and gotten prayer from me after the service a few times, so I was aware of who they were.

And with tears today, she said on the phone once. She said it again when I got there, the wife did. She said, these were her very words, I would be a raving maniac right now except for the last five months at Bethlehem because of the sovereignty of God.

That's what she said, raving maniac were her words. She said it twice. I would be a raving maniac.

Because this is the second big blow in their lives in the last few years. A son with leukemia. And then she just spelled it out a little bit about thanking.

They've only, I don't know. I don't know what other parts of the church they've been folded into yet. But she said, to have met the God you preach as a sovereign God who's in control of all things and turns all things for good and has good purposes for his people in the darkest moments.

That's making all the difference. And she's telling all kinds of people that on the phone. She reported one as a phone call to me.

That word raving maniac. She said to a friend, I would be a raving maniac if it weren't for having been here. So my point is, good foundations make for good hospital experience.

So I don't need to go over there and preach the sovereignty of God. I don't want to preach when I come to your hospital room. It's not the time to preach, it's the time to embrace.

And pray. Hold a warm sweaty hand. Is it biblical? Foundations of sanctifying power.

So I've got eight steps here in number two. You see them, 2.1, 2.2, and so on. And we'll just go from the one to the other, laying more.

Picture me as a bricklayer now in these eight steps. We want these eight bricks in place under the building we're trying to build here. Faith is the great worker.

So this relates directly to your question that you asked me a minute ago. 1 Thessalonians 1.3. Constantly bear in mind, I constantly bear in mind, or we are constantly bearing in mind your work of faith. I think that little phrase means faith works.

That's the name of John MacArthur's book. It's a good book. Faith works.

2 Thessalonians 1.11. Same thing. Work of faith. To this end, we pray for you always that our God may count you worthy of your calling, fulfill every desire for goodness, and the work of faith with power.

May He fulfill the work of faith with power. So God is beneath the faith performing the work, but He does it through the channel of faith. 2 Thessalonians 2.13. But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren, beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and by faith in the truth, which is promises of future grace and other things.

Sanctification comes by two things. The Spirit and faith. So how do you become holy or loving? The Spirit bears His fruit through faith.

We'll see that connection later. Acts 26.18. I send you to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God in order that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me. Amazing phrase.

You believe in justification by faith? I hope when we're done with this seminar you believe in sanctification by faith. I could take some well-known study Bibles and take you to sentences where it says you get justified by faith alone and then you, by your efforts, add to that and get sanctified. This says we're sanctified by faith.

And we'll see more. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but what means anything? What means everything? Faith working through love. Faith works through love.

Faith works. Faith is the kind of thing, faith is the kind of thing that when it's real, works. And see what I'm trying to do is go beyond the Westminster Catechism or confession to understand the dynamics because that's what the Westminster Confession said.

Faith alone justifies, but the faith that justifies is never alone but is always accompanied by works. And I want to understand why? Why? How? What's the nature of faith such that it must always be accompanied by works? That's what we're after. And I'm just showing you that it is with these texts.

But the goal of our instruction, Paul says, is love. The goal is love. The goal is love in the Christian life.

Where does it come from? From a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith. It is from faith. Love comes from faith.

Hebrews 11.8 By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed. By faith he obeyed. By faith he obeyed.

And so the whole chapter 11 is all about obedience that comes from faith. Romans 9.31 Very important verse. 9.31 and 32 Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that law.

So there is a way to try to obey God and fail. Big time. 613 commands, and they were pretty good at them.

Why did they fail? Why didn't they attain to the law? Because they did not pursue it by faith. But as though, very crucial, as though it isn't. But as though it were by works.

The law was never meant to be pursued by works. When Paul uses the phrase, works of the law, he usually means the Pharisaic misuse of the law as a ladder by which we climb to heaven, demonstrating our moral prowess and merit. It was never meant to be kept that way.

It was meant to be the description of a life that comes from trusting our Heavenly Father. That's what the Garden of Eden was all about too. Don't eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, was not, here I'm going astray from my outline, I'm going to get in a big trouble, but I'll say it and then leave it and disturb.

Was not a covenant of works. In the sense that the command, don't eat of the knowledge of the tree, don't eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, was, if you keep the law perfectly, you will merit eternal life, and when you merit it, I will give it to you. I regard that as a covenant of legalism, and I think God

would be a heretic if He commended legalism to Adam.

I don't think God's a heretic, and therefore I don't think He was commending legalism, and therefore I think what He meant when He said don't eat of the tree was, I'm your Father, I know what's best for you, I have a life of future grace held out in front of you, I will bless you, just trust Me. And if you trust Me, you won't try to get the knowledge of good and evil for yourself, you'll get it from Me. He was asking for the obedience of faith.

It was a covenant of grace, even though there was no demerit. Grace is not just God's response to demerit, it is His response to the absence of any merit. Now this is weighty, and most of you don't even know what controversy I'm addressing here, and that's okay.

But my point is, whether you start with Adam at the tree, whether you start with Moses at Sinai, or whether you start with the Sermon on the Mount, or whether you start with Romans 4, there is one covenant by which God has gotten right with His people, or commended the getting right with Him, and that is a covenant by grace through faith alone. And that's based on this text in great measure. The reason they did not arrive at the law is because they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works, and they stumbled over the stumbling stone.

Well, here is number 2, 2.2. What I just tried to establish is that the works that are required of us in holiness to see God are the inevitable outcome of genuine faith. That's what I just tried to show you. I didn't explain how they are yet.

I just tried to show you that they are. Did you? Okay. Now, next point to establish is the grace we have faith in is not only God's disposition to save the unworthy, but the power of God exerted to bless us in the future with all that we need.

Here's what I'm trying to get at here. Faith in God's grace is not just faith in a way that He is, a gracious God, or a thing that He did in the past, send His Son to die for us. Yes to both of those.

It is also a faith in grace which the Bible says is in great measure future and promised. And we must believe it. You're not a believer in Jesus if you say, well, half of His Word says He came to die for me so that His grace might forgive me.

And half His Word says that He's going to keep showing that grace toward me for everything I need to get me to glory. I trust Him for this. I don't trust Him for that.

That is not a believer. That's like saying I trust my wife on Monday and not the rest of the week. You can't build a marriage on that kind of trust.

And believe me, the future of grace is a lot longer than the past in your life. The past grace in my life is a little over 52 years, 52 and a half. Great! I appreciate those 52 years of grace.

And if I were to take it back historically, I could say since the cross. Or I could take it back to creation. Since creation.

Well, choose your story of creation. I don't know if you have young earth or old earth people in this room. But that's short, whatever it is.

Whereas you're going to live forever. Is there going to be grace enough to keep you alive forever? Is there going to be grace enough to keep you a believer forever? Is there going to be grace enough to keep you from being bored? I used to fear boredom like crazy as a kid in heaven. Oh! This is going to be terrible! Glassy seas and cities, 1,500 miles square and gold streets.

Yuck! I didn't love God like I should in those 9 year old and 12 year old days. God wasn't at the center. All I could think of is there might not be any football there.

Or my dog, Blackie, who was my best friend at one season in my life when nobody else seemed to be. Or Sonny Paul, my next door neighbor that I played with until we went our separate ways in junior high school. Maybe they won't be there, and then how could it be good? Grace is in the future.

Now here's some texts. By the grace of God, I am what I am. And His grace toward me did not prove vain, but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.

So here you've got these references of grace. By the grace of God, I am what I am. His grace toward me did not prove vain, but I labored, and yet it wasn't I, it was the grace that was laboring in me and with me.

Now what's the point? The point is, Paul is not just talking about the death of Christ here. He's talking about grace landed on Paul. In Galatians 1.12 or somewhere in there, it says that God set Paul apart from before the time he was born.

That was grace. And then Damascus Road knocks him off his donkey, blinds his eyes, brings him to his senses, saves his soul. That's grace.

And then He opens his eyes again, gets him baptized, and makes him a preacher of the Gospel. That's grace. And then day after day, He energizes him here.

Labor, labor, labor, more than all of them. That's grace. So as Paul understands his life, there's grace coming down on him moment by moment by moment.

And as he looks toward his dying day in Rome, he has confidence. Grace has made me what I am. Grace is sustaining me in this moment.

Grace is going to get me through. It was grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved. How precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed.

I'm going to get the verse that I want here now. Through many dangers, toils, and snares, I have already come. T'was grace that brought me safe thus far and finish it.

Grace will lead me home. Isn't it good to find your theology in hymns? It's grace that got me to tonight at age 52, believing in God, sustained through many hard things, and only grace. Nothing but nothing.

Gratitude for past grace ain't going to get you home. You can't run your car tomorrow on gratitude for yesterday's gas. 1 Corinthians 1.3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now there's Paul mediating grace. He begins every letter like that, and he ends every letter like this. Every one of them, no exceptions.

Grace to you at the beginning, grace be with you at the end. That's amazing. I discovered that in 1994.

I'd never seen that before in my life. I'd never read that in a single commentary. That in the beginning of every one of his letters, it's grace to you, and at the end of every letter, it's grace with you.

So I've never had anybody preach a sermon, nor read a single theological book or commentary to help me understand why that is. So what you're going to hear right now is my effort to figure out why he talked that way, and it is simple. He writes this letter knowing that the elders of the church will stand up before a little community of believers in Thessalonica or Corinth or somewhere and read it to them as a word, an authoritative, God-inspired word from an apostle.

So it's as though Paul is there, and they begin to read grace to you as the word begins to come. So grace is now flowing through this word. It takes them half an hour to read it or whatever.

Grace is coming to you. Then he's thinking as he comes to the end of the letter. Okay, they're about to come to the end of the letter.

The service will soon be over. There'll be maybe some exposition or fellowship or song or something, and they're going to take leave. They're going to go out into the hard world, and the slaves are going to go back to their slave masters, and the wives are going to go back to their unbelieving husbands, and the rich are going to go back and try to deal with the temptations of covetousness.

And he says as they go, grace be with you. It's all grace. The only way you're going to be sustained in the understanding of my word is if grace comes to you now, through it and in it, and the only way as you leave this church service and go back to the hard places of life is if grace goes with you.

So Paul's mind about grace is not primarily a past thing. It's not primarily a past thing in the cross. I'll talk about that in a minute.

It is primarily... It's coming. It's coming now. It's coming tomorrow.

It's coming the next day. Bank on it. Live on it.

Trust in it. If the boy gets leukemia, there's one hope. Grace.

And God gave me another... God is so good to me today. I sat beside this bed and I thought of this sermon I gave. Some of you will remember this.

On sustaining grace that I gave on our 125th anniversary here. How many were at that service? 125th anniversary service. Do you remember this little poem? Sustaining grace.

Not grace to bar what is not bliss, nor flight from all distress, but this. The grace that orders our trouble and pain and then in the darkness is there to sustain. And I remembered it.

I couldn't believe the Lord let me remember it at His side. 2 Corinthians 8, 1-3 I'm going to skip that one. That's a little long.

But all these are good. 2 Corinthians 9, 8 God is able to make all grace abound to you that always having all sufficiency in everything you may have an abundance for every good deed. Oh! What more could I want to underpin what I'm trying to say? God will, will, will make all grace abound to you.

This is your future now. This is your future the rest of this night. And any hard thing you're going home to.

God is able to make all grace abound to you so that you will have a sufficiency in everything and an abundance for every good deed. So sometimes I'm worried. What if I get tortured? What if I get threatened? What if somebody puts a gun to my head or a knife to my throat or bends my arm back or starts pulling my fingers back? I mean, I have these awful thoughts about suffering for Jesus.

And I say, God, I don't know what I would do. And I think God's answer is, I know what you'll do. You don't know what you'll do.

But I'll be there with a special grace for that moment. And that's the grace you'll need. Not this one.

I got enough grace tonight, I think, to finish this lesson. Ikes! It's only seven more minutes. Ooh! So I need grace now for coping with my anxiety about taking too long on each point.

If you wonder, if you doubt that a good deed will be required of you. I had a person come up and take my hand about a few months ago after I'd given an urgent plea to believe. And he came up and he took my hand and he said, I want to believe so bad.

What hinders you to believe? That's belief. And he said, I don't think I can do it. I don't think I can live the Christian life.

And, of course, the answer is he can't. He can't. And the whole point now is will the Spirit give to this man a discovery of the meaning of future grace? Because that's the issue of his salvation right now.

He can handle Jesus dying on the cross to forgive him of his sins. He's just not sure that he can do all those verses that I listed at the beginning. And the answer is no, you can't.

And if you wait until you think you can, you'll never believe. You must believe this verse. You've got to believe this verse.

2 Corinthians 9.8 That God is able to make all grace abound to you so that you'll have an abundance for every good deed. This is not money only. I mean, in the context, he's dealing with giving.

But if good deeds require money, there'll be enough money. If the money isn't provided, that's not one of the good deeds you're expected to do. 12.9, 2 Corinthians, he said to me, My grace is sufficient for you.

My power is perfected in weakness. Most gladly, therefore, will I boast about my weaknesses. So you feeling weak tonight? Afraid you may not make it? Take heart, because one of God's designs is future grace is highlighted by your weakness.

And God loves to highlight His future grace. Okay, maybe we can get this one more point in before we're done tonight. This is point number three under two.

2.3 Therefore, faith is future oriented. It trusts in future grace. If the grace we need to lean on is in large measure future, then faith must be future oriented.

So let's just see some evidences that it is. Hebrews 11.1 Faith is the assurance of things hoped for. And what you hope for is future grace.

So there's a definition of faith as future oriented. Or you've got, I won't read all of this, Romans 4.16-24 It's just the illustration of Abraham as a model of faith for us and what Abraham trusted was promises. In hope, this is verse 18 of Romans 4, in hope against hope he believed in order that he might become the father of many nations according to that which had been spoken.

So shall your descendants be. And without becoming weak in faith, he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead. He was about a hundred years old in the deadness of Sarah's womb.

Yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief. So unbelief and belief relate to the promise of God in Abraham's life, and he's given as a paradigm or a model for our justifying faith. One more verse on this future orientation of faith.

2 Corinthians 1.8-9 For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction. Now, picture our friend, and I don't think they'd mind me telling you who it is, because it's the Boyum family, and Michael is the son who has leukemia. So picture Michael saying this right now, which he can, and he is legitimately able to say this.

For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction, which came to us in Asia, in St. Paul, that we were burdened excessively beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life. Those thoughts will enter his mind. They already have, I'm sure.

I'm going to die, he might say. Maybe he won't, and I pray that he won't, and I believe that he won't. But, he doesn't know that for sure, so he says that with Paul.

Indeed, we had this sentence of death within ourselves, in our white blood cells, in his case, so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead. Now, there are two things to observe here. There's a purpose implied in this so that.

We had this sentence of death, in other words, this affliction that came upon us in Asia, this sentence of death, which was so severe that I thought I was going to die, had a so that to it. Now, there is a theology, represented by people, that argues that when these kinds of afflictions happen, and these kinds of death sentences land on believers or unbelievers, it's Satan who does it. Only.

Satan does do it, does a lot of it. But this so that right here, is not Satan's so that, nor is it Paul's so that. Whose so that is it then? Tell me.

It's God's so that. There's nobody but God that can say that. Nobody.

Nobody but God can have this purpose. Paul didn't put himself into the affliction with the view of getting his heart purified. Satan didn't put him into this in order to get his heart more leaning on God.

That wasn't Satan's design. Satan no doubt has a design. You meant it for evil, God meant it for good.

Remember that? Genesis 45. Genesis 50 verse 20. So that we would not trust in ourselves.

Here's the second thing to notice now. Would not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead. When's he going to do that? In the future.

Now look at how much God prizes faith in future grace here. He loves Paul. Believe me, if there was any man loved by the Lord Jesus and the living God, it was Paul.

He loved him. Nobody suffered more than Paul did for the cause of Christ eventually being crucified or being given to the lions. He loved him.

And in his love for him, he brings him into this affliction which is so severe it looks like his life is going to be taken. It's a sentence of death and he has a purpose in it. Now, if you love somebody and you will that they go through an excruciating experience even to the point of death, then the thing you're trying to accomplish in that must be hugely important.

Because love wouldn't do it otherwise, would it? I mean, love would find a better way. And if God ordains to do it this way, this, this must be really important to God. God wants Paul not to trust in Paul.

And you know what? I've never heard a single solitary saint say, I learned the deepest things in life through the best of times. And I learned to trust God most when I was the richest, the healthiest, and the most. Never in my life have I heard anybody say that.

The refrain is always the same. Ask a seasoned believer, not a young believer who's still in diapers and is trying to turn the gospel into a health, wealth, and prosperity religion. But a seasoned, older believer where they learned about the faithfulness of God.

Where they came to trust God. Where they went deep with God. Where they got pure with God.

Where they fought off some sins with God. And they will tell you they were the hardest of times. They were the most painful of times.

They were the times of greatest loss. Because either there you get angry at God and throw in the towel. Or you get real with God.

And discover His real. Faith in future grace. And it isn't just the resurrection of the dead.

It's everything that implies. It's all the glories. Every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

Therefore faith is future oriented and embraces. For faith is future oriented and embraces. Drop that word.

A future governed by God's grace. And therefore superior to the future promised by sin. And therefore is a means to sanctification.

Let's pray. Father in heaven, I love grace. I love for the suffering.

And for the people who are on the brink of the happiest days of their lives perhaps. Entering retirement. Or entering marriage.

Or about to graduate. Or some good thing is about to happen. And others about to face the most devastating thing they've ever faced in their lives.

I love grace. And I'm asking Lord that you would take what we've seen here. And show us and teach us the depths of grace.

That is there rooted in the past of the cross and the resurrection. And flowing like a waterfall out of the future over our lives. To sustain us in the darkest and best of times.

Oh God, make these 80 or so people who are here, sages. Make them rocks. So that when they're old.

And young people come and ask them. Where does faith come from? How do you become a strong believer? They'll be able to tell some biblically grounded stories. Pray in Jesus' name.

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