

SEPTEMBER 2006—*Are We Spiritually Bankrupt?*

The word “grace” is common among religious people in our day. But is it rightly understood? C.S. Lewis said he avoided the word because he didn’t think it carried much clear meaning for the uninstructed person. However, though he rarely used the word, Lewis did give explanations which can help us grasp its meaning.

For Lewis, the first step into a right relationship with God is the discovery in our personal experience of our own spiritual bankruptcy. He describes this discovery in *Mere Christianity*:

“Now we cannot...discover our failure to keep God’s law except by trying our very hardest (and then failing). Unless we really try, whatever we say there will always be at the back of our minds the idea that if we try harder next time we shall succeed at being completely good.... But in another sense it is not trying that is ever going to bring us home. All this trying leads up to the vital moment at which you turn to God and say, ‘You must do this. I can’t.’ Do not, I implore you, start asking yourselves, ‘Have I reached that moment?’ Do not sit down and start watching your own mind to see if it is coming along. That puts a man quite on the wrong track. When the most important things in our life happen we quite often do not know, at the moment, what is going on. A man does not always say to himself, ‘Hullo! I’m growing up.’ It is often only when he looks back that he realizes what has happened and recognizes it as what people call ‘growing up.’ You can see it even in simple matters. A man who starts anxiously watching to see whether he is going to sleep is very likely to remain wide awake. As well, the thing I am talking of now may not happen to everyone in a sudden flash—as it did to Saint Paul or Bunyan: it may be so gradual that no one could ever point to a particular hour or even a particular year. And what matters is the nature of the change itself, not how we feel while it is happening. It is the change from being confident about our own efforts to the state in which we despair of doing anything for ourselves and leave it to God.... The sense in which a Christian leaves it to God is that he puts all his trust in Christ: trusts that Christ will somehow share with him the perfect human obedience which He carried out from His birth to His crucifixion: that Christ will make the man more like Himself and, in a sense, make good his deficiencies.... He will share his ‘sonship’ with us, will make us, like Himself, ‘Sons of God’....”¹

As Lewis says, until we discover in personal experience our own spiritual bankruptcy, and despair of our ability to do anything that will put us right with God, we will not turn to Christ in true faith. Where are you?

*For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing;
it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

EPHESIANS 2:8-9 (ESV)

¹ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1952, 1980, 2001), p. 146-147.