

It Is Written

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Grace Is Not License

By Leslie Diestelkamp (1980)

Paul was a great advocate of salvation by grace and almost all of his writing is saturated with expressions of gratitude for and confidence in God's grace. Yet Paul was moved by the Holy Spirit to write a warning to all of us to remember that grace does not give license to sinfulness. He said, "that as sin reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord"; and then he added, "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein?" (Rom. 5:21-6:2).

If we have come into Christ through an obedient faith we are freed from past sins and given a precious relationship to God, in Christ, but we are then obligated to continue in righteousness. And we must not assume that because we are in Christ, God will "look the other way" when we sin. There is nothing in the New Testament to suggest that God will overlook any transgression or that He will decline to charge a person with guilt just because that person is a child of God.

Jesus lived a perfect and sinless life for three purposes: (1) To "do the will" of the Father (Jn. 4:34); (2) To set a perfect example for us to follow (1 Cor. 11:1); (3) To provide the only adequate sacrifice for the sins of others (Heb. 4:15; 7:26). But the perfect life of Jesus (which he lived on earth) is not imputed to us—that is, that is not attributed to us or counted for our account. Two verses of scripture need consideration here:

1. In Romans 4:8, Paul wrote, "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." Paul was not saying that God would overlook some sins in certain people, but he was teaching that some people's sins are forgiven and, therefore, will not be held against them (see Rom. 4:7). And, in context, these verses were all teaching that righteousness today is not in keeping the old law but in and through faith in Christ, and that this righteousness is possible for both Jew and Gentile. Either (Jew or Gentile) if he sins is counted a sinner and if he is forgiven he is counted righteous.

2. In Romans 5:10, Paul wrote, "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life." Paul is not saying that the sinless life of Jesus will save the Christian today, but he is saying that the Christian is saved today because Jesus is alive -- He is now at God's throne, interceding for us. Because we have a living Savior, we can have security as we "walk in the light" (1 Jn. 1:7) and as we "walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit" (Rom. 8:1).

God's grace is an expression of His love for sinful man, but God's very nature is incompatible with sin itself. Therefore, God cannot be reconciled to a sinner, but a sinner can be reconciled to God through the blood of Jesus which was and is a sufficient price, paid in full, to enable God to justify the ungodly when they turn from ungodliness in faith.

Saved By Grace

Every Bible believer must acknowledge that we are saved, if saved at all, by God's grace. However, there is much confusion as to the process by which we become beneficiaries of that saving grace. Actually God's grace comes to us in a three-fold manner. Perhaps we could simplify by saying that salvation for the alien sinner is accomplished only as a result of three separate, yet related circumstances, as follows:

1. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (Jn. 3:16). Indeed, God has "set forth" Jesus Christ to be "a propitiation through faith in his blood . . . for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God" (Rom. 6:25). That is salvation (provided) by grace.

2. "Or despiseth thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance" (Rom. 2:4). A true believer will be moved by the love of God, his supreme sacrifice and the love of Christ, and will respond with sincere submission in repentance and baptism ("They that gladly received the Word were baptized..." -- Acts 2:41). This is salvation (motivated) by grace.

3. But when the sinner had obeyed the gospel, he had earned nothing at all. God is not obligated to him even yet. However, under this circumstance and at this point God does pardon the sinner's guilt. "...ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness" (Rom. 6:17,18). This is salvation (received) by grace.

Conditional Salvation

Thus we see that everything which man cannot accomplish by merit, and that is necessary to our salvation, God has fully supplied by His generous grace. And He has made it sufficient for "whosoever will" (Rev. 22:17). He is "no respecter of persons" (Rom. 2:11).

Yet this abundance of grace does not save all because: (1) Some never know of this grace. "How shall they call on him of who they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of who they have not heard?" (Rom. 10:14). (2) Some who hear will not believe and (3) some who believe will not obey.

Peter said, "Save yourselves..." (Acts 2:40). Jesus said, "Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Mt. 7:21). Again Jesus said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mk. 16:16).

As far as God's part in our salvation is concerned, it is altogether, totally, of grace! But as far as man's part is concerned, salvation is altogether, totally conditional. Salvation for the sinner is obtained by grace and by an obedient faith, and that is not at all contradictory!

The Threefold Promise To Abraham

By Kyle Campbell

Genesis 12:1-3 reads, "Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed."

This was a landmark promise in the Bible, and it sets the stage for unfolding of the scheme of redemption. Three promises are made in the preceding scripture: 1) A land would be given to his descendants; 2) God would make a great nation of Abraham; and, 3) All the nations of the earth would be blessed through his seed (cf. Genesis 22:18).

The first promise was fulfilled when Abraham was promised the land of Canaan. The second promise was fulfilled when the Israelites became a nation at Mt. Sinai (Exodus 19:5-6; 24:7-8). In Joshua 21:43, the Bible records that all of the land that was promised to this new nation was given to them. The third promise was fulfilled in Galatians 3:16, where the seed that would bless all nations was Christ.

Lots of people now think that some of these promises remain to be fulfilled. However, the Bible clearly says that all has been fulfilled. God's plan of salvation has been fully revealed! What is left is for you to obey God and do His will. Abraham was blessed "because thou hast obeyed my voice." Will you obey God and repent of your sins, confessing Christ, and being baptized for the remission of your sins?