

CHIEF

MINISTRIES

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Our church today has developed a deceptive thought process. One which has been conceived and brought forth by an unbalanced teaching of grace. Most often I hear grace being thrown out there as an excuse or cover-up for a life of disobedience. This swing to the left has caused many to lose their taste for the whole counsel of God. It's like a child who eats only what he likes and is accustomed to an unbalanced diet. We will never develop an appetite for what we have not tasted. To remain balanced we need to consider both the goodness and the severity of God. (Romans 11:22) *"Note then the kindness and severity of God: severity towards those who have fallen, but God's kindness towards you, provided you continue in His kindness. Otherwise, you will be cut off."* If our counsel is not balanced we have a tendency to develop a warped or bent understanding of God.

Grace is unmerited, and it does cover – but not in the manner some are teaching today.

This lack of balance has infiltrated so many churches, prisons and their teachers that I feel I must address this issue. I see so many "Christians" feel at liberty to disobey God wherever it is inconvenient for us. We "assure" ourselves that grace covers our disobedience. After all, God loves us and understands how busy we are, and He wants us happy at all costs! Right? Granted, we do not verbalize those thoughts, but they exist just the same. This thinking is validated by the fruit we see in the church. It's not uncommon to see church members who are irreverent towards all forms of authority. They are self-willed, stubborn, insubordinate, and driven and controlled by their various lusts. They pursue the lifestyle and possessions of the world or the titles and positions in the church while calling them the blessings of the Lord. Unaware of their deception, they rest – secure – they call it, based on the grace of God.

The grace of God is not merely a cover-up. Yes, it covers – but it goes beyond that. It enables and empowers us to live a life of obedience!

Let's look at the standard God looks for in a believer's life. (Matthew 5:21-22) *"You have heard that it was said to those of old... But I say to you....* Jesus used this pattern five more times in the rest of the chapter. First, He quoted the requirement of the Law of Moses with, *"You have heard it said."* Then He introduced what God seeks from a believer under the new covenant with, *"But I say to you"*. In doing this he contrasted the Mosaic Law with grace and truth.

"The law was given through Moses, but grace and truth come through Jesus Christ." (John 1:17) he introduced the dimension grace would impart to the law. One was outside the restraint while the other was an inward transformation. Don't we always hear how grateful we should feel to be "under grace" rather than "under law" as law was too rigid a lifestyle? Well, I rejoice in knowing that too! But it's not because God standard of obedience is so much more lenient now! His standard is higher under grace! What did Jesus say in His Word about some issues? *"You have heard that it was said to those of old, "you shall not commit adultery." But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust (desire) for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart."* (Matthew 5:27-28) A judgment of guilt was passed under the old covenant if an act of adultery was physically committed. In contrast, under the new covenant a guilty verdict is awarded if a man merely looks at a woman with desire in his heart. In plain language, under the law you had to do it - under the new covenant of grace, all you have to do is entertain the tempting thought!

Here's another: *You have heard it was said to those of old, "You shall not murder and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment." But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother "Raca" Shall be in danger of hellfire (Matthew 5:21, 22)*

The word "raca" can be translated fool, but the idea of the word is "you good-for-nothing moron". It was a term of reproach commonly used by Jews at the time of Christ. If anger reached the point where one called a brother a moron, Jesus said he was in danger of hell.

In the Old Testament you were guilty of murder if you took a physical life. Under the grace of the New Testament, God equates anger against your brother with the severity of murder. 1 John 3:15 says, *"Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him"*.

Under the law you had to run a knife through someone. Under grace if you refuse to forgive or if you allow prejudiced or another form of hatred to rule your heart, it is evidence that God's eternal life or grace does not abide in you.

We have been deceived into believing that entrance to God's kingdom is granted to the lawless of heart. Again, does this sound like the grace being lived and taught? We are tempted to view grace is a big cover-up.

If grace is merely a cover-up, then Jesus contradicted the very grace he came to impart.

But this is not true, for in Titus 2: 11-12 it says, *"For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly in the present age."* Grace is the ability to live free of ungodliness and worldly desire. In actuality it is the capability to live a lifestyle of obedience. The presence of outward fleshly lusts is a manifestation of a disobedient heart.

"For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man who is sent idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience." (Ephesians 5:5-6)

Notice Paul referred to those who would not enter God's kingdom as *"sons of disobedience"*. Their outward sin was rooted in a disobedient heart. Cane's outward manifestations were anger, jealousy and murder, but the root of these was his disobedience to God's authority.

The writer of the Hebrews exhorts, *"Let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear."* (Hebrews 12:28) Grace is a force that enables us to serve God acceptably. It is the essence of the power to live a life of obedience to God. This is the proof of our salvation. For we are told that Jesus *"gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works."* (Titus 2:14)

In rebuttal, some may argue, "But the Bible says, by grace we have been saved through faith not of our own works. It is the gift of God: (Ephesians 2:8, 9)

Yes, that is true, it is impossible to live a life worthy of our inheritance in the kingdom of God by our own strength, for all have sinned and fallen short of God's righteous standard (Romans 3:23). None will ever be able to stand before God and claim that their works, charitable deeds or good life has earned them the right to inhabit his kingdom. Every one of us has transgressed and deserves to burn in the lake of fire eternally.

God's answer for our shortcomings is salvation through His gift of grace! A gift cannot be earned! Romans 4:4 says, *"Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt"*. If you work for it, it's not grace. Even if you did it to earn grace, you could never live well enough to get it. When Martin Luther received this revelation in the 1500s, it was so revolutionary, it brought forth the Reformation. This realization has brought many out of spiritual darkness. But we have failed to emphasize the power of grace not only to redeem us but to also grant us the ability to live in a new way. For the word of God declares: *"faith by itself if it does not have works, is dead."* But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works (James 2:17-18)

James wasn't contradicting Paul he was rounding out in clarifying Paul's message. The evidence that a person has received God's gift of grace is a life of obedience to the Lord. A person who consistently disobeys God's word is one in whom faith has never truly existed or it has failed. What! A person's faith can die? ABSOLUTELY! Jesus said to Peter, *"But I have prayed for you that your faith should not fail, and when you*

have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren". (Luke 22:32) if faith was unable to fail why would Jesus himself have prayed in this manner?

Jesus warned his church. *"Remember therefore from where you have fallen, repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place - unless you repent."* (Revelation 2:5) he dealt with the fact that their works had failed. He did not mention their intentions! O beloved, here his word and quit listening to the incomplete doctrines of mere men! *"You see then that I man is justified by works, and not by faith alone"* (James 2:24)

James preface this statement by using Abraham, the father of faith as an example: *"Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which says, Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness".* (James 2:21-23)

What happened here? Abraham believed God and therefore did the works that resulted in justification. In our day belief has been reduced to mental agreement. Multitudes have prayed the sinner's prayer because they were moved emotionally, yet they return to the path of disobedience. They continue to live for themselves, trusting in intellectual salvation that never change their hearts. Yes, they believe in God, but Jesus said, *"You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe - and tremble."* (James 2:19) what good is it to acknowledge Jesus Christ without a change of heart and thus a change in actions?

In the Scriptures we find believe means not only to acknowledge the existence of Jesus but also to obey His will and His word. Hebrews 5:9 says Jesus became the author of salvation to all who obey him. To believe is to obey. The proof of Abraham's belief was in his correspondence works of obedience. He offered what was most precious to him. Nothing, not even his son, meant more to him than obeying God. This is true faith. It is why he is honored as the father of faith (Romans 4:16) Do we see this faith evident in the church today? How have we been so deceived? Just saying you have faith does not prove you actually do. God knows your heart. What is he telling you right now as you read this?

Revelations 3:14 says... *"These things say the Amen, the faithful and true witness."* Faithful means He is consistent and constant. True means He will only speak the truth even if it is not to delightful. Faithful and true means He will be consistently true. No matter what the reaction or pressure. A false witness will lie and flatter. He tells you only what you want to hear at the expense of what you need to hear. As a church we have embraced ministries that have told you what you wanted to hear. Jesus comforts and builds but not at the terrible expense of neglecting to tell you the truth. He loves and forgives but also chases and corrects. Hear His words! *"I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot"* (Revelation 3:15) Notice He said works not intentions. How did He know their condition? Their actions! The action of the cold would be blatant disobedience. They do not pretend to be something they are not. They are lost and know it. They serve other gods - money, business, themselves. They live for the pleasure of the moment.

On the other hand those that are hot are consumed with God. God encompasses their hearts and beings. It is their joy and delight to obey him. They also know their true condition. Jesus warned the last church of its condition. He warned them to be one or the other because being lukewarm was more objectionable as he said in the next verse. *"I will vomit you out of my mouth."* (v16) What is lukewarm? Too cold to be hot and too hot to be cold. It's a bland. Lukewarmer's become like who they are around. They can blend in with the obedient. They know the Scripture, can sing the songs, and say the right statements and clichés. When around the worldly, they blend in again they obey God when it's in their best interest. They are really motivated by their own desires.

When a person vomits it's because whatever we've eaten we can't assimilate. We vomit out what doesn't belong. Neither the cold nor hot are deceived. But the lukewarm are. They think their condition is something other than what it is. This is why God's judgment will be worse for them. The lukewarm think they are serving God. They confess salvation by grace but in actuality have fallen short of the very grace they confess. (Hebrews 12:15) This makes them even more difficult to reach. Persons who think they are saved see no need for salvation. This is why Jesus goes into detail about their true condition. *"Because you say, I am rich, have become wealthy and have no need of nothing - and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, lined and naked"*. (Revelation 3:17)

Without a doubt, they believed they were saved, secure and on their way to heaven. Why should they repent? They confessed a born-again faith, but their lives confess differently. Therefore, Jesus loves them enough to point out their deception.

Not everyone who says they are saved by grace is. A true believer is not known by what he confesses but by his fruit of obedience. *"Therefore by their fruits you will know them. Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in Heaven". (Matthew 7:20-21)*

Scriptures speak of two groups of people who expect entrance into the kingdom of heaven but will be denied: 1) those that give their lives to Jesus for selfish purposes. They are more interested in the blessings than the Blessor. From the start they are deceived because the cares, riches and pleasures of this life choked out the word they hear and confess (see Luke 8:14) and 2) those who convert with sincere motives but later lose their salvation. This group walks away from obedience to His Lordship. I'll address this next month.

Those in the first group join with Jesus solely for the benefits of salvation. Though they accept his salvation, they never come to know the heart of God. They only go as far as his provision. They seek Him for their own benefit; their service is self-motivated, not love motivated. Jesus said, *"I never knew you"*. This is the translation of the Greek word ginosko. It means to know intimately. 1 Corinthians 8:3 says *"But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him."* God intimately knows those who love Him. They have laid their lives down for Him. (John 15:13) Only those who do this can keep His Word. Remember, *"He who does not love Me does not keep My words"*. (John 14:24) True evidence of love of Jesus is not what is said but what is lived. No matter how passionately or boldly they say otherwise, they who are not submitted to God's authority do not love Him.

Judas joined himself with Jesus. It appeared he loved him. He dropped everything to follow him. Judas stayed under the heat of persecution and the threat of death. He didn't quit when the other disciples did. (John 6:66 - notice that reference) He cast out devils, healed the sick and preach the gospel. Jesus *"Called his 12 disciples (including Judas) together and gave them power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases. He's sent them to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick."* (Luke 9:1-2)

However Judas' motive was not right from the start. He never repented of his self seeking ways. He reveals his true nature when he went to the chief priests and said, *"What are you willing to give me if I deliver him to you?"* (Matthew 26:14) *he lied and flattered to gain advantage* (Matthew 26:25) See any of that in your local church?

Through his time with Jesus he took money from the treasury for personal use (John 12:4-6). He never knew Jesus intimately even though he spent 3 1/2 years in His company. Many today are like Judas. *"But why do you call me 'Lord, Lord' and not do the things which I say"?* (Luke 6:46) Jesus confronted the ministers of His day. *"You travel over land and sea to win a single convert and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are"* (Matthew 23:15).

Jesus made it clear, *"Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the Gospels will save it"*. (Mark 8:34-35)

I hope you can see the difference between the grace Jesus preached and the grace to many have believed. The present-day message of grace often extols, "Believe in Jesus; pray the sinners' prayer, confess Him as your Savior, and then you will enter the kingdom of heaven". There is very little mentioned about the cross or repentance.

Those who are converted in this manner tend to believe any disobedience is covered by the carte blanche grace of God. Could this condition be the reason for the lack of true spiritual authority and power in our churches?

I hope you hear this message in the spirit with which it has been delivered. I love God's people and I want them to prosper as their souls prosper. Therefore, I am compelled to proclaim His truth. Teaching and doctrine shape an individual's belief and life. My heart breaks for those who have been lulled into lukewarm living. Paul instructed Timothy, *"Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do you will*

save both yourself and your hearers". (1 Timothy 4:16) We must heed this warning. Perverted truth may sound good and may even appeal to our sense of reason, but it will lead to deception. The truth of God's Word will feed you and build you up. It will also train you to discern between correct and incorrect thinking. Perverted truth can disqualify you for the kingdom. This is why God admonishes us to give His Word our full attention that we might correctly handle it. This letter bears both warning and encouragement. The warning: Don't allow incorrect doctrine of grace to disqualify you. The encouragement: There is the strength to live an obedient life through the grace of God which never fails. May that grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ be with you.

Be real!

Chief

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