

UNDERSTANDING GOD'S GRACE #1

Grace Vs. Performance

I. Introductory Remarks.

In this message today I want to talk about the importance of continuing to walk in God's grace after) initial experience of God's wonderful work of grace in your lives. You say, "That's what I have been doing?" "What's the big deal?"

I believe many of us fail to walk in the fullness of God's grace and often revert back to walking in a spirit of condemnation and guilt, which leads to a performance based walk, because we fail to understand reality of a continuous walk in God's grace.

Galatians 3:3 *Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by flesh?*

Galatians 3:3 *Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal through human effort? (NIV)*

This is a common problem that exists among all Christians, regardless of our doctrinal background because of our human nature, something of which we all share in common.

To get an idea of what I am talking about, let me ask all of you a question. If you knew you only one month to live, how would you prepare yourself to meet the Lord during that month? Would you pray harder? Would you memorize more scripture? Would you read your Bible more? Would you be involved in more spiritual works? Would you give more money and get your tithes up-to-date? Would you witness to everyone you see? Or would you repent of every bad habit and sin that you could think of? If your answer was yes to these questions, you are a performance based Christian who is trying to work to gain God's favor. These are all good things to do, but this isn't what God expects from us to gain His favor.

There is no amount of work you can do to earn any more of God's favor. His favor has already been granted to you through His grace which is a free gift.

My question to you today is, "Are you living by grace or are you living by performance?"

Galatians 5:4 *You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.*

II. Our Need For God's Grace.

Before we go too far in this, let's take a look at our need for God's grace and the provision that He made for our fallen sin nature.

1. Our Condition Prior To Our Salvation Experience.

Romans 3:10-12 *As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks after God. They have all gone out of the way; they together have become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one."*

Isaiah 64:6 *But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousneses are like filthy rags; we all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.*

Romans 3:23 *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.*

2. God's Answer to Our Need.

Romans 5:8 *But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

Ephesians 2:8-10 *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.*

Definition of Grace: Grace is God's free and unmerited favor shown to guilty sinners who deserve only judgment. It is the love of God shown to the unlovely. It is God reaching downward to people who are in rebellion against Him. (Jerry Bridges - Author of "Transforming Grace")

III. Living in God's Kingdom By Grace.

When we came to Christ, we recognized our need for His grace and love and had no problem accepting what He had to offer because of our helpless

condition. But how many of us continue to live in this helpless condition, being totally dependent upon His grace and sufficiency to cover our lives?

Galatians 3:3 *Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal through human effort? (NIV)*

If we came into God's kingdom by grace, we must also live in it by grace. If we couldn't get into God's kingdom by good works, good works will not sustain us either.

1. We Must Be Continually Motivated By Grace.

Philippians 1:6 *being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you [by His grace] will [will also by His grace] complete it until the day of Jesus Christ;*

We are brought into God's kingdom by grace; we are sanctified by grace; we are motivated by grace; we are called to serve by grace; we receive strength to endure trials by grace; and we are glorified by grace. The entire Christian life is lived under the reign of God's grace.

Being motivated by grace means that we realize that it isn't our spiritual disciplines and works that earns us God's favor and blessings in our lives. This all continues to flow from His riches in grace, whether we deserve it or not.

There are many godly spiritual disciplines that we all need to be involved in of which are often constituted as our spiritual works. Things such as regular church attendance, daily devotions, Bible study, prayer, fasting, scripture memorization, witnessing, and giving of tithes & offerings are all good and important Christian activities. The question is, do you do these things to earn God's favor or do you do them in response to His love and grace?

What happens if I forget to pray or fail God? Does that mean I go through the whole day with God ignoring me and not desiring to use me? A person who is secure in God's love and grace doesn't get blown out of the saddle when they fail or something goes wrong. They get back up and go on like nothing has happened. They confess and forsake their sin and go on, secure in God's love and grace.

Proverbs 24:16 *for a righteous man may fall seven times and rise again, but the wicked shall fall by calamity.*

Hebrews 4:14-16 *Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens,*

Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

2. Our Works Are A Result Of Walking In God's Grace.

Ephesians 2:9-10 *...not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.*

The truth of the matter is that our works are an indicator as to how we are responding to God's love and grace. If we are doing things out of guilt, to please and appease others, we are performance oriented.

If we are doing things out of a godly response to God's love & grace, we are operating under His grace.

James 1:25 *But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.*

The true work that God has for each one of our lives can only be released through His grace. When we are looking into the perfect law of liberty we find the spiritual work that God gives us to do is somehow a part of our overall calling and gifting in Him.

3. God's Blessings Flow Through His Grace, Not Our Performance.

All of God's blessings and riches flow through His grace and if we are walking as a performance based Christian we have actually fallen from grace and are losing our inheritance in Him as well. That's why so many Christians live unproductive lives.

Ephesians 2:7 *that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.*

When Jesus paid it all, He not only purchased your forgiveness of sins and your ticket to heaven, He purchased every blessing and every answer to prayer you will ever receive.

1 John 3:22 *And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.*

The most important commandment that God has given to us, is to love Him with all our heart, mind and soul.

IV. Trying To Live In God's Kingdom By Performance.

Performance oriented people work for God's approval. They think they must constantly earn God's approval, so they find themselves getting involved in lots of things that may not even be the will of God for their lives. God's true giftings can never be recognized, because they are looking to their own means and sufficiency for motivation in the kingdom.

Galatians 3:3 *Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal through human effort? (NIV)*

Most of us are legalistic by nature, we innately think so much performance by us earns much favor and blessing from God.

Peter had this same attitude when he said to Jesus in *Matthew 19:27*, "We have left everything to follow you. Therefore what shall we have?"

Peter had already added up his merit points, and he wanted to know how much reward they would buy. Jesus answer to him was, "many who are first will be last, and the last first."

Jesus then goes on to teach on the "Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard," which is a parable that deals with this whole issue of performance vs. grace.

Matthew 20:1-16 The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard. The people in the parable who were chosen first had added up their merit points just as Peter had, and when they found out they were not be rewarded on those terms they were upset.

There are rewards that we will receive for our labors, but if our motivation is self serving and not provoked by a response to God's love and grace, we will probably lose our rewards..

If you were to do a study on rewards in the Bible the one common denominator you would find would be that of humility. Matthew 10:42, Luke 6:35, Romans 2:8-11, and Ephesians 6:5-9.

Proverbs 22:4 *By humility and the fear of the LORD are riches and honor and life.*

1 Corinthians 3:13-15 *each one's work will become manifest; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.*

If we are doing things out of guilt, shame, eye service, as men-pleasers or some other self-serving motive we are performance based people who have fallen from the workings of God's grace and as a result we do not inherit the blessings that are entitled to us in the kingdom. When we fail we are guilt ridden and full of condemnation, thinking God hates us and is mad at us, instead of receiving the forgiveness and security that comes from abiding under His grace.

V. Concluding Remarks.

Let us all determine to be motivated by God's grace and love, which will produce in us the godly character and good works that He is desiring in our lives.

Romans 2:10-11 *but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God.*