

# Understanding God's Grace #3

## Grace Is Freedom & Liberty In Christ

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### 1. Introductory Remarks.

In this series of messages I have been talking about the importance of walking in God's grace, because it is as we determine to walk in His grace that we are really walking in His favor and delight. I've talked about the importance of walking in grace vs. having a performance based walk and then more recently that our walk in holiness is a gift of His grace as well. In this message I want to address the issue of our freedom in Christ and how it is a delicate balance that we must endeavor to walk in at all times.

***Galatians 5:1*** Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.

In the book of Galatians the apostle Paul deals with two very important aspects of walking in God's grace. He deals with the issue of legalism and the issue of walking in the lusts of the flesh. When the Christian fails to walk in the beauty of God's grace these are the two extremes that he either finds himself walking in. Both areas are yokes of bondage that we must avoid.

Christians sometimes find themselves walking in either of two extremes in this area. They either turn the grace of God into licentious, which is a total regard for any rules whatsoever or they turn the grace of God into a legalistic walk that is full of rules and regulations.

### 1. Defining Licentiousness Behavior.

***Jude 1:4*** For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Vines Expository dictionary defines Licentiousness or lasciviousness as excess, absence of restraint, indecency, and wantonness. Websters dictionary defines it as lewd and lawless behavior. Other words to describe this behavior are debauched, promiscuous, carnal, lustful, indecent, obscene and smutty. This is what happens when one takes the grace of God and uses it as a license to sin.

### 2. Defining Legalistic Behavior.

Legalism is anything we do or don't do in order to earn favor with God. It is concerned with rewards to be gained or penalties to be avoided. It consists of conformity to manmade religious rules, which are often unspoken, but nevertheless very real.

**Mark 7:6-8** *He answered and said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: 'This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.' "For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men; the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do."*

As already mentioned, these are the two extremes that God wants us to avoid as we seek to walk in the beauty of His grace. Neither one of these areas represent the Grace of God. The persons who are caught up in these bondages do not understand the meaning and the purpose of God's grace in our lives. Let's look more closely to God's word concerning these two extremes.

## **II. God's Word Concerning Licentious Behavior.**

Again, licentiousness or lasciviousness is an excess or absence of restraint. It is indecency, and wantonness and a total disregard for any rules whatsoever. It is a conduct of habitual sinful behavior.

### **1. The Grace Of God Teaches Us To Deny Ungodliness.**

It is important for us to understand that the grace of God actually teaches us to deny ungodliness and to slive soberly and righteous in this world rather than continuing in the old sinful nature.

**Titus 2:11-14** *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, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who 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.*

**Romans 6:1-3** *What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?*

If we have truly been born again, we should be dead to sin and alive to God and His grace working in our lives to produce the fruit of His Spirit rather than the lusts of the flesh.

## **2. He Who Continues To Practice Sin Does Not Know God.**

1 John 3:6-7 Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him. Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous.

When I talk about one who continues to sin, I am talking about one who has never come to repentance, but has turned the grace of God into a license to continue in his sin. He has no desire to quit sinning, because he has never really been born again. If we have truly been born again, the Holy Spirit in us causes us to hate and despise sin to the degree that we want to repent of it, not continue to wallow in it. The operative word in the above passage is "practice". We find this again in the passage in Galatians concerning the works of the flesh. The word "practice" speaks of habitual behavior.

***Galatians 5:21***...just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

***Galatians 5:24*** And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

## **III. Avoiding Legalism.**

The other extreme that Christians sometimes find themselves in is that of walking in legalism which nullifies the grace of God. To counteract the sinfulness of licentious behavior, some in Christian ministry have fallen into legalism. It has been taught, either directly or implicitly, that God's grace is conditional, that there is a degree to which it is based on our performance. There has been an undue focus on God's law and ridiculing of liberty. The freedom set forth in Galatians is not freedom from God, but from those who insist on some form of legalism in the life of a believer.

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

***Galatians 5:1*** Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.

Legalism is anything we do or don't do in order to earn favor with God. It is concerned with rewards to be gained or penalties to be avoided. It consists of conformity to manmade religious rules, which are often unspoken, but nevertheless very real.

Legalism requires conformity to the "do's and don'ts" of our particular Christian circle. We try to force this legalism on others or allow others to force it on us. It is conformity to how other people think we should live instead of how the Bible tells us to live. Like the Pharisees of Jesus' time, we have tried to help God by adding our man made rules to His commands. Jesus' charge against the Pharisees, is still valid today.

There are many ways in which we have tendency to fall into legalism. We build fences to keep ourselves from committing certain sins. Soon the fences become the issue rather than the sin. Differing opinions also cause legalism. Eg. makeup, music, movies, tv. holidays, eating, etc.

***Romans 14:5*** *One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind.*

Legalism happens when we try to enforce our convictions on others for the sake of conformity and acceptance.

Charles Swindoll told of a missionary family who literally were forced off the mission field over peanut butter. They were sent to a location where peanut butter was not available, so they asked friends back in the States to occasionally send them some. The problem was that the other missionaries considered it a mark of spirituality not to have peanut butter. But the pressure from the other missionaries to conform became so intense, the newer family finally gave up and left the mission field.

#### **IV. True Freedom And Liberty.**

***John 8:36*** *"Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.*

God has called us unto freedom and liberty and desires for us to walk in the fullness of His grace experiencing great liberty and freedom.

***Romans 8:2*** *For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.*

**Galatians 5:13** *For you, brethren, have been called to liberty,' only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.*

**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.*

When you focus on grace in the fullness of its meaning, you will keep the law, liberty, and love in their proper relationship to one another. But if you focus on anyone them instead of grace, you will invariably end up in legalism or licentiousness.