

Grace and Truth United and Indivisible

"For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." John 1:17

Many Christians today live by the creed: "It is all about grace!" What they mean is that grace covers all their sins: past, present and future. They believe Christians are sinners who cannot stop habitually sinning (just like unbelievers). They think the only difference between a Christian and a non-Christian is that God's grace covers all of a Christian's sins so a Christian does not have to worry about God's judgment for their chronic sins. As one so-called "Christian" put it: "God grades on a bell curve and everyone gets a passing grade." In other words, they mistakenly believe that some Christians may sin more than other Christians, but all Christians will still go to heaven, no matter how much they practice sin. Some Christians even go so far as to say they no longer need to ask forgiveness for the sins they commit because all their sins (past, present, and future) have already been covered by God's grace. And far too many Christians think the "good news" of the gospel is that they can receive forgiveness for their sins and yet continue to live in them. This philosophy may be soulishly comforting to those who cannot or do not want to stop practicing sin, but it is not Biblically true. When Jesus told people that their sins were forgiven, He also told them, "Go, and sin no more!" (John 5:14; 8:11)

It is said that every good lie has an element of truth in it. This is the reasoning behind this falsehood: "Since we could only be saved by grace, then grace must cover all of our sins; otherwise we could be saved by our works." The problem with this way of thinking is that it does not line up with the truth of God's Word. Because of spiritual ignorance, many Christians do not understand the relationship between faith and works. What does the Bible mean by "faith" and "works?" Faith is "what we believe" and works are "what we do," or the fruit of what we believe. The Bible says we are saved solely by faith in Jesus Christ because

there are no works which could ever earn us God's righteousness. Paul wrote, "For by grace you have been saved through faith... not by works, so that no one can boast (Ephesians 2:8-9)." But once we are saved, the Bible says we must then express our faith by our works; otherwise our faith is not valid. James said, "Faith apart from works is inactive and ineffective and worthless (James 2:20)." Therefore, salvation is not a result of our works, but works must result from our salvation if our faith in Jesus Christ is authentic. Thus we are not saved by obeying God's commands; however, after we are saved, we will obey God's commands if our salvation is real. This obedience is what the Bible calls the "obedience of faith" and the "works of faith" that every Christian should have if they are truly living by faith (Romans 1:5; 1 Thessalonians 1:3). As James said, "What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him?" (James 2:14)

As a consequence of this misunderstanding about faith, many Christians are also spiritually ignorant of the true Biblical meaning and purpose of God's grace. In order to understand God's grace, we must look to the plumbline of truth, which is God's Word; otherwise man's natural tendency is to embrace some form of humanistic grace that, like soft clay, can be molded to the world's changing tides of culture, values, ethics and morals. This is why the Bible says both "grace and truth came through Jesus Christ (John 1:17)." The Biblical truth is that we can only be saved by God's grace (not by our own works); but after we are saved, God's grace enables us to stop sinning. What does this mean? God's grace (made available through Christ's death on the cross) has given us a two-fold deliverance from the curse of sin. By God's grace, we have been freed from the penalty of sin; and by God's grace, we have also been freed from the power of sin (when God removed our sinful nature when we were saved). However, since most Christians are spiritually ignorant of this second provision of the cross, they think they cannot stop practicing sin. As Paul said, "Come back to your senses as you should, and stop sinning; for there are some of you who are ignorant of God

(1 Corinthians 15:34)." And Paul also said, "Should we go on sinning so that grace may increase? May it never be!" (Romans 6:1) God's grace must never be used by Christians as a license to keep practicing sin. The Bible says, "My brothers, you were called to be free, but do not use your freedom as an opportunity to indulge in sinful behavior... and do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil (Galatians 5:13; 1 Peter 2:16)." God's grace (available through Christ's death on the cross) has been given to enable us to stop practicing sin. The Bible says, "The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, and instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live self-controlled, upright, godly lives in this present age (Titus 2:11-12)." If we believe and act on this truth of the cross, then living a godly life is the proof that our faith in Christ is genuine. However, if we continue to habitually practice sin, the Bible says that we walk in darkness, and we cannot have fellowship with Jesus Christ here on earth or in heaven. John wrote, "No one who abides in Him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has seen Him or knows Him... the one who practices sin is of the devil (1 John 3:6-8)."

The Bible says that any Christian who keeps practicing unrepentant, chronic sin after they are saved can no longer count on receiving the grace of God's forgiveness; instead they can only expect to receive the wrath of God's judgment. "For if we go on sinning willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for (forgiveness of) sins, but only a terrifying expectation of judgment (Hebrews 10:26-27)." If we never master the sins that habitually entangle us, then the grace of God (made available through Christ's death on the cross) will have been of no use to us. In the words of our brother Paul: "As God's fellow workers, we urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain (2 Corinthians 6:1)."

"You have already heard the word of truth, the gospel that has come to you... you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth." Colossians 1:5-6