

Works of the Flesh or Grace

Byrl Keith Chadwell, April 11th 2009

I came to Christ in denomination legalism. My early understanding of born again by faith, righteousness, and ultimately my eternal destiny was all unbelievably distorted by legalistic doctrine, teaching, lack of teaching and misunderstanding of the true meaning of God's Grace through Jesus Christ. For years I tried to do, do, do, what was right, right, right in the sight of God. I had no idea that it was impossible, by my own efforts, to ever succeed. Gut it out, try to do what is right. Repent every Sunday at the alter, try again next week.

Of course, I failed and then I tried more, and still I failed. I finally gave up. Perhaps just before I died, I could succeed and thereby squeak into heaven.

We may talk today of freedom from that kind of legalism, but it still exists. Today, legalistic doctrine in a variety of forms is still boldly proclaimed by some. However, too often, legalism in the body of Christ is much more subtle, yet still applied by individual Christians in various ways, to various degrees.

Sadly, the common definition of grace is understood as; "**unmerited favour**". However, this definition falls far short of the **true grace** that we must understand and allow God to apply in our Christian lives in order to fully come to the goal that God has purposed for His Church.

This common definition and watered down application of grace leaves many Christians holding the bag when it comes to appropriating the power of the Holy Spirit to deal with sin in their lives. For unless we see that grace is the Holy Spirit working in us to "*both will and to do*" the Fathers good pleasure, no amount of gritting our teeth and trying to do that which pleases God will ever really change our hearts.

Here from the *Geneva New Testament and Commentary* is Paul writing to the Ephesians. (Bold & *highlight emphasis are mine*)

Eph 2:8 For by ^(h) **grace** are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: [it is] the gift of God:

(h) So then, grace, that is to say, the gift of God, and faith, stand with one another, to which two it is contrary to be saved by ourselves, or by our works. Therefore, what do those mean who would join together things of such contrary natures?

Eph 2:9 ⁽⁹⁾ Not of works, lest any man should boast.

*(9) He specifically and completely takes away from our works the praise of justification, seeing that **the good works themselves are the effects of grace in us.***

The true definition of grace from Strong's Concordance is copied here below; (*highlight emphasis is mine*):

G5485 χάρις charis khar'-ece

From **G5463**; *graciousness* (as *gratifying*), of manner or act (abstract or concrete; literal, figurative or spiritual; **especially the divine influence upon the heart, and its reflection in the life;** including *gratitude*): - acceptable, benefit, favour, gift, grace (-ious), joy liberality, pleasure, thank (-s, -worthy).

To merely define the grace of God through Jesus Christ as "**unmerited favour**" has done much to water down Christian understanding and thus the universal appropriation of His true grace by believers.

In more recent years the Amplified Bible, has been very helpful, however, it has also done much to promulgate "**unmerited favour**" as the true definition of **grace**, which has not been helpful. Unwittingly, the Amplified Bible follows the word "**grace**" in the New Testament, numbered G5485 by Strong's Concordance, well over one hundred times with only a parenthetically amplified "**unmerited favor**".

The effect that this watered down definition of grace has contributed, down through the years, to Christian attempts to keep the law by the works of their flesh may be arguable. However, *in too many cases*,

Christians have developed a partial reliance or even a complete reliance on the "**grit your teeth and gut it out**" method to quit doing things they know they shouldn't do.

Then there are "*the legalist*" who still think that observing the liturgies of the Old Testament law, or subsequent additions down through the years, by so called Spiritual leaders will somehow enhance their Spiritual life.

Paul had this problem with some of his early converts;

Gal 3:1-3 O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?

This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?

Our flesh apparently does not give up easily in its own effort to control our hearts and thus our subsequent outward actions and eternal destiny.

Our hearts are the real battle ground. As Christians, our hearts are not ours, we are bought with a price and our hearts are the throne rooms of the temples of the Holy Ghost. Our hearts, are His and from our heart He is to rule this new Kingdom, which He began within us. Our bodies are the outer courts, but the things we can not see, are hidden in a Holy place deep inside of us. (hear the song; "The Tent" by accessing the music page of www.thekingdomisathand.net)

Our flesh is contrary to and is in all out warfare with our spirit man and prefers the "**do it yourself**" method of keeping the rules of God's new government within us. The prophet Isaiah foretold of this;

Isaiah 28:12-14 (NIV) "This is the resting place, let the weary rest"; and, "This is the place of repose"- **but they would not listen.** So then, the word of the Lord to them will become:

Do, and do, do and do, rule on rule, rule on rule; a little here, a little there- So that they will go and fall backward, be injured and snared and captured”.

We have often failed to understand that we can not change our hearts by our own efforts. We can try, try, try to do, do, do, what is right, right, right, by gritting our teeth and making every effort to prevail. If we only try to work out our righteousness through the works of our flesh, we will never attain to His righteousness. We will fail, fail, fail, and then fall back into the same trap we were in and then be re-captured again by the same lusts of our flesh and still must suffer the chastening and correction which is the consequences of our sin.

Gal 6:7-8 Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.

The **true grace** of Jesus Christ is the one and only source of entering into "**this resting place**", accessing this "**place of repose**" and ceasing from our "**do it yourself**" righteousness. **Only** by inviting and permitting the Holy Spirit to work in us to do what we can not do, can we ever attain to "**His righteousness**" and thereby, progressively, come to perfection, and even eventually unto the measure of the **stature** of Christ. We can no more clean ourselves up unto His righteousness than we could affect our new birth in the Spirit. This is all His work.

Matthew 6:33 But seek ye **first** the **kingdom of God**, and **his righteousness**; and all these things shall be added unto you.

Eph 4:13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the **stature** of the fullness of Christ:

True grace does not negate the righteousness which comes by faith. The righteousness that comes by faith is that righteousness which is hoped for, but waits in faith for **true grace** to progressively produce. For faith is only the substance of things **hoped for**, but not yet seen.

When we truly commit a problem to Him to clean up, and believe in faith that He can and will do it, we are righteous by faith until what we hope for is manifest. Remember the principle; *"It takes time from planting until harvest."* However long that takes, we must remember; ***He is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.***

2 Timothy 1:12 For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.

*Philippians 1:6 Being confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus **Christ**:*

Many Christians have lost the vision and thus even the hope of ever coming to the perfection and the full stature and measure of Christ that Paul wrote of in Ephesians the fourth chapter (4:13 above).

The hope of our calling in Christ is to actually, in fact, attain to **His righteousness**. We are to grow in true grace to become, by God's design, mature sons of God, beyond the righteousness which is by faith only, and actually come to manifest outwardly to the world a righteousness that is from the heart. This is "***His righteousness***".

Paul must have understood this, and it is apparent that he taught and encouraged the early church that righteousness was first by faith but was to be followed, **in time**, if pursued correctly, to perfection and maturity in Christ. This perfection would be then manifest to the world from a totally cleansed servants heart. Even he did not claim to have attained that goal, but he saw it as possible in Christ, and pressed toward that goal.

Php 3:12-14 (Phillips) Yet, my brothers, I do not consider myself to have "arrived", spiritually, nor do I consider myself already perfect. But I keep going on, grasping ever more firmly that purpose for which Christ grasped me. My brothers, I do not consider myself to have fully grasped it even now. But I do concentrate on this: I leave the past behind and with hands

outstretched to whatever lies ahead I go straight for the goal - my reward the honour of being called by God in Christ.

Php 3:15-16 (Phillips) All of us who are spiritually adult should set ourselves this sort of ambition, and if at present you cannot see this, yet you will find that this is the attitude which God is leading you to adopt. It is important that we go forward in the light of such truth as we have ourselves attained to.

It is God's goal that we go on to perfection in Christ in this earth, showing forth His righteousness from within our hearts to a dark and dying world, and thereby allowing Christ in us to truly be the manifestation of God's wisdom, power and love to the world, through us. We are to be His servants, obeying from the heart, only doing and saying those things we see the Father do. Christ in us, the hope of glorifying the Father again, even as Christ did.

Creation is waiting for this full manifestation of the Sons of God. Can we see then what the true hope of our calling is?

Eph 1:17-19 That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, And what *is* the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power...

For more on this subject see chapter four of the book, "the Kingdom of Heaven's at hand" titled; "Do, do, do, or Grace, grace grace", www.highcountryministry.com

