

## ***Discerning Truth and Error about God's Grace (Part 3)***

### **I. REVIEW OF THE PREVIOUS TEACHINGS**

- A. The most common area of false teaching is that which perverts biblical understanding of the grace of God. They pervert God's grace by reducing its message to receiving forgiveness without repentance and seeking to make people comfortable with God while continuing in their sin.

<sup>4</sup> ***For certain men (false teachers) have crept in unnoticed...ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny...our Lord Jesus Christ. (Jude 4)***

- B. The grace message inspires us to deny lust and gives us power to walk godly. We want the true teaching on grace because that is the only way that we will experience God's power in our spirit.

<sup>11</sup> ***The grace of God that brings salvation (deliverance) has appeared to all men, 12 teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age...13 Jesus gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people...15 Speak these things. (Titus 2:11-15)***

- C. Much of the "grace teaching" in the body of Christ is not true grace teaching. It is distorted because it empowers compromise and passivity as it gives people false confidence in their relationship with God. Grace is not an insurance policy to the unrepentant nor a license to live in compromise because of God's unconditional love (which is not given to unrepentant people).

### **II. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GRACE AND MERCY**

- A. What is grace? There is broad and general application of grace as well as a narrow and specific one. The broad application focuses on God's goodness, forgiveness, kindness and power. The narrow application focuses on God's enabling power in our inner man and our outward ministry.

<sup>2</sup> ***To Timothy...grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father. (1 Tim. 1:2)***

1. Mercy grants us God's forgiveness, grace imparts His power and peace frees us from fear (1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2; Tit. 1:4). All three are expressions of the unmerited favor of God.

2. Mercy is NOT receiving what we deserve (God's wrath). Grace IS receiving what you do not deserve (God's power for godliness and ministry).

<sup>9</sup> ***My grace is sufficient for you, My strength is made perfect in weakness. (2 Cor. 12:9)***

<sup>14</sup> ***Sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are...under grace. (Rom. 6:14)***

- B. To receive grace is to receive God's power (supernatural enabling) which includes insight (revelation, wisdom), desire (for God and righteousness) and authority in ministry (anointing).

- C. We are exhorted to grow in grace. This is not an exhortation to grow in forgiveness.

<sup>18</sup> ***Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. (2 Pet. 3:18)***

### III. WE MUST REPENT TO RECEIVE THE GIFT OF SALVATION

- A. We are justified (receive God's righteousness and favor) because of what Jesus did on the cross not because of what we do on earth (Rom. 3:21-31). God's righteousness cannot be improved upon. Our standing before God in heaven will not be more secure than it is now. Salvation is God's work. It is His gift to us. Believers are saved apart from earning it in any way (Tit. 3:5).
- <sup>21</sup> ***For He (the Father) made Him (Jesus) who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Cor. 5:21)***
- <sup>4</sup> ***The kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, 5 not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us... (Tit. 3:4-5)***
- B. We are accepted by God only on the basis of His grace. It is necessary to have a sincere heart attitude of repentance (that seeks to obey Jesus) to receive the benefits of God's grace.
- <sup>3</sup> ***I (Jesus) tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. (Lk. 13:3)***
1. Saving faith is always accompanied by repentance (Lk. 24:47; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 17:30; 20:21; 2 Pet. 3:9). Repentance means to turn from sin. It is a change of the attitude of the heart that always results in a progressive change in our character (Lk 3:8; Acts 26:18-20).
- <sup>7</sup> ***He (John the Baptist) said ...8 therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance. (Lk 3:7-8)***
2. Repentance is not a form of works-righteousness that earns salvation. A murderer would not expect to be pardoned before a court of justice because he changed his attitude.
- C. Obedience is an essential evidence of genuine saving faith (1 Pet. 1:6-8; 1 Jn. 2:3-4). It is error in the Modern Gospel that does not see a lifestyle of sin as a reason to doubt the reality of salvation.
- D. Saving faith reveals Jesus as Lord and thus leads us to receive Him as King of our life. A true believer does not take their sin lightly (1 Jn. 3:9-10) but seeks to obey God (Jn. 15:14; 1 Jn. 2:3) and live in God's Word (John 8:31; 17:6). The Modern Gospel calls us only to believe in the historical fact of Jesus' death on the cross. Even the demons believe this and tremble.
- <sup>19</sup> ***You believe that there is one God...even the demons believe and tremble! (Jas 2:19)***
- E. Our active faith is a result of God's gracious work in us. We are saved before our faith produces any change in our character. In other words, Christians sin after being genuinely converted.
- <sup>3</sup> ***God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. (Rom. 12:3)***
- F. The Spirit of grace helps us by granting us insight and desire to repent (Acts 11:18; 2 Tim. 2:25). First the Spirit moves on us then we respond to Him in humility in our faith and repentance. Then He responds to us by releasing more abundant grace.
- <sup>6</sup> ***He gives more grace...God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. (Jas 4:6)***
- <sup>25</sup> ***If God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth... (2 Tim. 2:25)***

#### IV. RECEIVING GOD'S GRACE

- A. The Christian life is a cooperation with God's grace. God will not do our part and we cannot do His part. If we do not do our part, then God withholds some of the blessing He wants to give us. Grace must be cooperated with. It can be received in vain (not producing lasting fruit in us).
- <sup>1</sup> *We...plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain. (2 Cor. 6:1)*
1. **Our part** includes making quality decisions to deny ourselves (say no to sin), to feed our spirit on the Word, to ask for God's help through prayer with fasting, and to embrace godly activities (serving) and relationships (fellowshipping, confessing our sins), etc.
  2. **God's part** is to release supernatural influences on our heart (power, wisdom, desires), body (healing), circumstances (provision, protection, direction) and relationships (favor).
- B. A sincere spirit of repentance is seen in those who:
1. **Admit sin**: instead of rationalizing it (defining sinful behavior in a truthful way)
  2. **Take responsibility for sin**: instead of blame-shifting (others are more responsible for it)
  3. **Take sin serious**: instead of being casual about it (neglecting to deal with it in a strong way)
- C. Three responses to sin in the Church today are: **Response #1, Sin is not important** (this is the compromise of the liberal). In other words, God understands and overlooks sin without disciplining the one who sins. **Response #2, Sin is the most important** reality about you (this is the error of religious legalism). In other words, sin is too important in that your sin defines you more than God's grace because it is more powerful before God. **Response #3, Sin is serious, but if repented of it is forgiven and thus not as powerful as God's grace.**
- D. Personal discipline and effort is one way that God ordained for us to posture our hearts to receive more grace to become holy. Prayer, fasting, meditation on the Word and obedience positions our heart before God to freely receive. These activities do not earn us God's favor. **Analogy: we put our cold heart before the bonfire of God's presence by seeking Him in the Word and prayer.**
- E. The Spirit gives us more grace if we humble ourselves by the fasted lifestyle and if we exert the time and effort to draw near to God. He will lift up the hearts of the humble in His power.
- <sup>6</sup> ***He gives more grace. He says: "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble"...<sup>8</sup> Draw near to God and He will draw near to you...<sup>10</sup> Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up. (Jas 4:6-10)***
- F. We can only fulfill our highest calling and destiny in this age and the age-to-come by walking in faithful obedience and with a history of diligently seeking God. Faithfulness does not earn our calling for us but it positions us to receive more grace that we might enter into it. The Spirit calls us to diligence that we might enter into our fullness of authority in this age and the age-to-come.
- <sup>11</sup> ***We also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power, (2 Thes. 1:11)***

## V. STANDING STRONG IN GRACE OR YIELDING TO LEGALISM

- A. We can only relate to God on the basis of His grace alone. We are saved by grace and we live by grace with confidence before God when we have good week or bad week. The cross is not just for unbelievers who need to become born again but for the daily need of all believers.
- B. The *outward activities* of legalism and discipline can be the same. The *attitude of the heart* is what distinguishes them. One operating in legalism engages in spiritual disciplines to seek to earn God's favor and to motivate God to like them. One operating in grace engages in spiritual disciplines out of confidence and gratitude that God has freely given them His love and favor.
- C. Many believe in being born again by grace yet they fear losing God's favor because of a bad week. To earn God's favor in a good week would require that we are 100% good. Jesus said, "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:48). James said, "Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it" (Jas. 2:10). The best week is will still not good enough to earn God's favor. Our best acts of obedience are tainted with our imperfect love and impure motives and unprecedented pride.
- D. We are not to relate to God based on how well we have lived in the last week. God does not like us more if we are disciplined in prayer and His Word. When it is time to pray for the sick or lead someone to the Lord, do you have more confidence if you have been more obedient?
- E. We have no need to bargain with God after sinning then repenting and claiming Jesus' righteousness. Grace changes our heart by giving us confidence that God enjoys us (after we stumble and repent). We cannot work through the unsettled issues in our life without confidence that God is smiling on us. Guilt says that our actions are wrong. Shame says our whole personhood is wrong. Shame hinders our ability to settle the issues in our life.

## VI. GOD'S RESPONSES TO PEOPLE ON THE EARTH

- A. God loves all the unbelieving world even when they have no regard for Him (Jn. 3:16; Mt. 5:45).
- B. Jesus refuses to forgive the people who ask for it if they refuse to repent (i.e., Esau, Saul, Cain).  
<sup>22</sup> *Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name...?' 23 'I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me!'" (Mt. 7:22-23)*
- C. God has tender patience with those who do not repent. They are not to confuse this with His approval or favor in their life. Jesus even gave Jezebel time to repent (Rev. 2:21).  
<sup>11</sup> *Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil. (Ecc. 8:11)*  
<sup>4</sup> *Do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? (Rom. 2:4)*

- D. God rejoices over sinners who repent of their rebellion (Lk. 15:4-10). Rebellion is a defiant heart response that says no to God and has no immediate plan to obey Him (1 Sam. 15:22-23).
- E. Spiritual immaturity is not the same as rebellion. Rebellion and immaturity may outwardly look the same but the heart is very different. God sees the heart. Our repentance, obedience and love for God are sincere even while weak, flawed and fragile. The believer who sins, shows their sincerity by quickly repenting and renewing their war against that sin. Do not write yourself off as rebellious if in fact you are spiritually immature. The illustration of clean and unclean animals is useful in understanding this difference – both sheep and swine become stuck in mud.
- F. Struggling in weakness is not the same thing as being a hopeless hypocrite. The fact that we are weak does not mean we are not genuine lovers of God. A hypocrite is somebody who says one thing about truth but does not pursue it. As genuine lovers of God we do not attain to everything we aim for. A true believer sincerely pursues it with a willing spirit. Sincere repentances is not the same as attaining “sinless perfection” in this life.
- <sup>41</sup> ***The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. (Matt. 26:41)***
- G. When David sinned his heart was wounded because he knew that he grieved God's heart. Therefore, David sincerely repented. When Saul sinned he planned to continue in it until caught and confronted, then he only gave an outward show of repentance. Saul's heart was defined by the Lord as being rebellious not spiritually immature (1 Sam. 15:22-23).
- Samuel said: "Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice...<sup>23</sup> For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He has rejected you from being king." (1 Sam. 15:22-23)***
- H. God's mercy gives us confidence that we can have a new beginning with God as a first class citizen. We must understand our spiritual identity as a genuine lover of God. **Question:** are you a slave of sin who struggles to love God or a lover of God who still struggles with sin.
- <sup>6</sup> ***Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life? (Ps. 23:6)***
- I. Grace gives us confidence that we can have a new beginning with God with assurance that He enjoys us after we repent. We “push delete” after we have sincerely repented. Jesus paid the price that we might stand before God with confidence of having His favor. This is very different from “pushing delete” on our need to understand why and how we sinned. It is necessary for us to understand the process and mindset that contributed to a stronghold of sin in our life.
- J. God enjoys the redeemed even in our immaturity and weakness as we continually walk in sincere repentance and seek to love Him wholeheartedly. We must have the assurance that He enjoys us to walk in wholeheartedness that runs to Him instead of from Him as we seek Him.

- K. We will walk in spiritual disciplines much more with the assurance that God enjoys us. We view conviction of our sin differently when we feel loved and favored by God because it does not feel like condemnation or accusation from God.
- L. God's enjoyment of us is not His approval of all we do. God's enjoyment of the prodigal son is seen in giving him the best robes. This newly repentant yet immature prodigal son still needed transformation in many areas of his life (Lk. 15:20-24). The fact that God likes us does not mean He overlooks all the areas of our lives that need transformation.
- M. God's disapproval of an area in our life brings His correction as He removes what hinders love in us. The Lord disciplines His immature children that He enjoys (Heb. 12:5-12). Divine correction is not rejection. God hates the sin yet enjoys the person He disciplines (Ps. 103:13-14).  
*<sup>12</sup> Whom the LORD loves He corrects, as a father the son in whom he delights. (Prov. 3:12)*
- N. God can smile over our life in a general sense, while He deals with us in a particular issue. That issue does not define our entire relationship with God. However, if we do not obey in that area, then sin will grow and affect other areas. He will discipline us in the area that we resist Him in.
- O. God loves, enjoys and entrusts greater power in ministry to the mature. God entrusts more of His power to those who are mature in obedience. In this we do not earn God's power but are protected while operating in it. Four things increase as we experience more of the Holy Spirit's power (God's zeal, Satan's rage, man's demands, our emotional capacities).
- P. Maturity provides protection in the anointing. Gifts of the Holy Spirit are by faith not by earning them with discipline. (Acts 3:11-12; Gal. 3:5). Miracles attest to or endorse a person's ministry (Acts 2:22) and it brings a counterattack of Satan (Lk. 14:30-32; Jn. 14:30).
- Q. Our diligence and spiritual maturity definitely impact our quality of life and ministry, as well as our reward and function in the age to come.