

Discerning Truth and Error about God's Grace (Part 4)

I. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GRACE AND MERCY

- A. Justice is getting what we deserve both positively and negatively. Because of our long history of sin we deserve God's wrath. God's mercy grants us forgiveness so that we do not receive the wrath that we fully deserve. We must be 100% righteous 100% of the time to deserve God's power and blessing. God's grace imparts His power and blessing to those who do not deserve it.
- ¹⁶ Let us therefore come boldly to the Throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Heb. 4:16)***
- B. We are justified or receive God's righteousness, love and favor because of what Jesus did (on the cross) not because of what we do (Rom. 3:21-31). The righteousness God freely gives us cannot be improved upon. Our acceptance before God in eternity will not be more than it is now.
- ²¹ 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)***
- ⁴ The kindness and the love of God...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)***
- C. It is necessary to have a sincere heart attitude of repentance to receive God's saving grace. Repentance means to turn from sin and to God. It is a change of the attitude of the heart that always eventually results in a progressive change in our character.
- ³ I (Jesus) tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. (Lk. 13:3)***
- ⁷ He (John the Baptist) said ...8 therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance. (Lk 3:7-8)***
- D. 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.
- E. Faith is always accompanied by repentance (Lk. 24:47; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 17:30; 20:21). A sincere commitment to obey Jesus according to the light we receive is an essential evidence of faith.
- ³ By this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. 4 He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar...the truth is not in him. (1 Jn. 2:3-4)***
- F. A sincere spirit of repentance is seen in those who:
1. ***Admit their sin*** instead of rationalizing it away as being okay to do.
 2. ***Take responsibility for their sin*** instead of blame-shifting to make others responsible for it.
 3. ***Take their sin serious*** instead of being casual about resisting it as a great enemy.
- G. Jesus refuses to forgive the people who ask for it if they refuse to repent (i.e., Esau, Saul, Cain).
- ²² 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)***

II. RECEIVING GOD'S GRACE

- A. Grace must be cooperated with. It can be received in vain (not producing lasting fruit in us).
¹ *We...plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain. (2 Cor. 6:1)*
- B. God will not do our part and we cannot do His part. **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 and relationships (fellowship, confessing), etc. **God's part** is to release supernatural influences on our heart (power, wisdom, desires), body (healing), circumstances (provision, protection, direction) and relationships (favor).
- C. 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. God gives us more but does not like us more when we are disciplined in prayer and His Word.
¹³ *Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction...¹⁴ Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it. (Mt. 7:13-14)*
²⁴ *Strive to enter...the narrow gate, for many...seek to enter and will not be able. (Lk. 13:24)*
- D. 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.
⁶ *He gives more grace. He says: "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble"...⁸ Draw near to God and He will draw near to you....¹⁰ Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up. (Jas 4:6-10)*

III. STANDING STRONG IN GRACE OR YIELDING TO LEGALISM

- A. 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.
- B. We are saved by grace in all 3 tenses of salvation (past tense: justification; present tense: sanctification; future tense: glorification). We are to live in grace (confidence before God) when we have a good or bad week or month. To earn God's favor in a good week would require that we are 100% good. 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 not good enough to earn God's favor. Our best acts of obedience are tainted with imperfect love and impure motives and pride.
- C. We have no need to bargain with God after sinning then repenting and claiming Jesus' righteousness. Grace gives us **confidence** that God enjoys us (after we stumble and repent).

IV. SPIRITUAL IMMATURITY IS NOT THE SAME AS REBELLION

- A. 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. Rebellion is a heart response that persistently says “No” to God and has no immediate plan to obey Him (1 Sam. 15:22-23).
- B. The spiritually immature sincerely repent or seek to obey Jesus in each area of their life that the Holy Spirit shines His light on. Their repentance is sincere even when it is weak, flawed and fragile. Our sincere repentance is expressed by quickly renewing our war against the sin we stumbled in. Sincere repentance is not the same as attaining “sinless perfection” in this life.
- C. God does not confuse our spiritual immaturity with rebellion. The OT law distinguished between clean and unclean animals (sheep and swine). They can both become stuck in the mud.
- D. Struggling in weakness (immaturity) is not the same thing as being a hopeless hypocrite (rebellion). Our weak love is not false love. As genuine lovers of God we do not attain to everything we seek. A hypocrite says one thing about truth but does not seek to obey it. 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.
- E. When David sinned his heart was wounded because he knew that he grieved God's heart. His repentance was sincere. When Saul sinned he planned to continue in it until confronted. Then he only gave an outward show of repentance. Saul's heart was rebellious not spiritually immature.
- ²² *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...23 For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you (Saul) have rejected the word of the LORD, He has rejected you from being king." (1 Sam. 15:22-23)*

V. HOW GOD FEELS TOWARD PEOPLE

- A. God loves all the unbelieving world even when they have no regard for Him (Jn. 3:16; Mt. 5:45).
- ¹⁶ *God so loved the world that He gave His only...Son that whoever believes... (Jn. 3:16)*
- ⁸ *God demonstrates His love toward us...while we were sinners, Christ died for us. (Rom. 5:8)*
- B. God releases natural blessings and great acts of kindness on evil and unjust men.
- ⁴⁵ *Makes His sun rise on the evil and the good...sends rain on the just and unjust. (Mt. 5:45)*
- C. It is necessary to have a sincere heart attitude of repentance to receive God's saving grace. Jesus refuses to forgive the people who ask for it if they refuse to repent (Mt. 7:22-23).

- D. God's mercy gives us confidence that we can have a new beginning with God as a "first class citizen." This results in giving us the assurance that God enjoys us (even in our weakness) as we walk in sincere repentance (that seeks to obey Him). Then we run to Him instead of from Him.
- ¹⁷ Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. ¹⁸ There is no fear (confidence) in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. (1 Jn. 4:17-19)***
1. 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 to understand the processes and mindsets that contribute to strongholds of sin in our life.
 2. We will walk in spiritual disciplines much more with the assurance that God enjoys us. We cannot work through the unsettled issues in our life without confidence that God is smiling on 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.
 3. Guilt says that our actions are wrong. Shame says our whole personhood is wrong
- E. God's enjoyment of us is *not His approval* of all we do. The fact that God likes us does not mean He overlooks all the areas of our lives that need transformation. God revealed His enjoyment of the prodigal son by the father 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).
- F. God can smile over our life in a general sense, while He deals with a particular area of our life. 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 disciplines us in the areas that we resist Him.
- G. God corrects areas in our life that He disapproves of to remove that which hinders love in us.
- ¹⁰ He (disciplines us) for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. ¹¹ No chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those trained by it. (Heb. 12:10-11)***
- H. Divine correction is not rejection. God enjoys the very ones He disciplines. God hates the sin yet enjoys the person He disciplines (Ps. 103:13-14).
- ¹² Whom the LORD loves He corrects, as a father the son in whom he delights. (Prov. 3:12)***
- ⁶ For whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives. ⁷ If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons...⁸ But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. (Heb. 12:6-8)***

- I. God has tender patience for a season with believers who do not instantly repent. They must not confuse this with His approval. Jesus gave Jezebel and her disciples in Thyatira time to repent.
- ²¹ *I (Jesus) gave her (Jezebel) time to repent of her sexual immorality...²² I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent...²³ I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. I will give to each one of you according to your works. (Rev. 2:21-23)*
- ¹¹ *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)*
- ⁴ *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)*
- J. God's jealous for us requires that we live in wholehearted love and obedience before Him.
- ⁵ *Do you think the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit...in us yearns jealously"? (Jas 4:5)*
- ¹⁴ *For the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God (Ex. 34:14)*

VI. UNDERSTANDING GOD'S ANGER

- A. God's anger is mentioned over 250 times in the Bible. Five times it is used in reference to an individual (once with Moses in Ex 4:14 and four times with David in Ps 6:1; 27:9; 30; 38). The remaining times He speaks to nations (10 times toward Gentiles and 235 times towards Israel).
- B. Moses and David were the primary leaders of God's people and purpose in their generation. In other words, they were given unique privileges and entrusted with significant responsibilities that would affect salvation history for generations to come. They each were treated very tenderly by God before and after these "moments of God's anger" toward them. We interpret God's anger towards them in a way that includes His history of treating them with tenderness and privilege. God's anger toward them was different from His anger toward Israel as a nation in rebellion.
- C. One Hebrew word study defines anger as God's nostrils flaring and his face bright red. Anger like love is an emotional word that has different dimensions to it that can only be defined in context. It has several meanings depending on who is saying it and in what context it is spoken.
- D. God's anger is only stated once directly in the NT. Scripture describes God's anger towards individuals in the NT as being grieved with them. One reason for this is that they did not have the close relationship with God that Moses and David did so as to awaken the same anger.
- ⁵ *When He had looked around at them with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts, He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand" ...his hand was restored. (Mk. 3:5)*
- ³⁰ *Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God... (Eph. 4:30)*
- ¹⁹ *Do not quench the Spirit. (1 Thes. 5:19)*

VII. SPIRITUAL MATURITY ALLOWS US TO RECEIVE MORE (NOT BE LOVED MORE)

- A. Our spiritual maturity allows us to receive more but doesn't prove God loves us more.
- B. 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).
- C. 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). Our maturity impacts our quality of life and ministry, as well as our reward and function in the age to come.

VIII. FALLING AWAY OR LOSING ONE'S SALVATION

- A. Some believers will depart from the faith as their consciences are progressively seared.
¹ Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (Second Coming)...³ Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first... (2 Thes. 2:1-3)
¹ Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, ² speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron... (1 Tim. 4:1-2)
- B. A believer can depart from the faith only once and only after their conscience is seared.
⁴ For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, ⁵ and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶ if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame. (Heb. 6:4-6)
²⁰ For if, after they (the Bible teachers of 2 Pet. 2 and those they allure) have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. ²¹ It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. (2 Pet. 2:20-21)
²⁶ For if we sin willfully (persistently, as a lifestyle) after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, ²⁷ but a certain fearful expectation of judgment...²⁸ Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy...²⁹ Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? ³⁰ For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine; I will repay," says the Lord. And again, "The LORD will judge His people." ³¹ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. (Heb. 10:26-31)