

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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The Grace of God That Brings Salvation

For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world (Titus 2:11-12).

From this passage, I note the following things regarding the grace of God: (1) it brings salvation; (2) it has appeared to all men; (3) it is a teaching instrument; (4) it teaches one from a negative and positive viewpoint how to live in this present world; (5) what it teaches constitutes definite requirements that man is to accept if he is to be benefited by the grace of God. So many marvel about the grace of God, but how many of these are ready to accept the simple facts stated in Titus 2:11-12? It appears that we live in an age when men view God's grace as an umbrella that covers everything without men having to comply with the conditions in God's will. Without the grace of God none of us would have the hope of eternal salvation. Paul states in the parenthetical expression that "by grace ye are saved" (Ephesians 2:5). However, the Scriptures do not state that men are saved by grace; alone or only by grace. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8-9). By one's obedient faith, he has access into the grace of God whereby he is saved. "By whom we also have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Romans 5:2). Yet, so many seem to expect the grace of God to do it all without their having to have the faith to comply with the conditions stated in God's will. We have mentioned what grace does, but we also need to be aware of what grace does not do.

Grace Does Not . . .

Circumvent Jesus Christ. "For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1: 17). The Scriptures do not separate grace from Jesus Christ. What one does or authorizes, the other does. Speaking of Christ, Paul said, "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace" (Ephesians 1:7). What Jesus teaches regarding redemption and forgiveness of sins is according to his grace.

Ignore the Gospel. Paul speaks of "the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24). The gospel of Christ is of the grace of God. The gospel and the grace of God are also not to be separated. We note this from Galatians 1:6-7: "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel. Which is not another: but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ." What the gospel does, the grace of God does! The gospel of Christ is not some mystical catch-all and neither is the grace of God.

Nullify Obedience. It seems some believe that the grace of God saves them without obedience to God's word. It is God's unmerited favor that grants us the privilege of obeying that we might be saved. When one contends that grace nullifies his need for obedience, how can there be proper value to statements emphasizing obedience? Jesus is the author of eternal salvation to those who obey him (Heb. 5:8-9). In a book where perversions are given concerning grace, Paul speaks of those becoming servants of righteousness by obeying that form of doctrine delivered to them (Rom. 6: 16-18). Our love for God is determined by keeping his commandments (1 John 5:3). Obedience is one of the key words in the New Testament. If grace nullifies obedience, why is there so much said of the value of obedience in God's word? It may be argued that one cannot obey God's commandments and one needs grace to suffice for his inability to obey. John wrote that his commandments are not grievous (1 John 5:3). There are no grounds in the Scriptures for a person contending that the commandments are beyond man's ability to obey. The true grace of God involves respecting his commandments and obeying from the heart the things commanded of us. We can faithfully do what God expects of us and there is no need to advocate grace doing something that is not taught in the Scriptures. "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city" (Rev. 22:14).

License to Sin. Some hold the view that, after a person becomes a child of God, grace unconditionally covers sins that one commits. Such unconditional cleansing is not taught in the Scriptures. When a child of God sins, he is commanded to follow the law of pardon to the erring child. Peter told Simon to repent and pray that he might be forgiven. John wrote, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). If grace unconditionally covers sins, why would there be any need to confess our sins? Be thankful for the grace of God, but beware lest you abuse its true meaning and purpose!

- Bobby Thompson

The Self-Inflicted Plague of Regret!

Talk to any professional therapist and they will confirm that regret plagues the lives of an overwhelming number of their clients. Many are filled with anger and sadness as they mourn "bad" decisions they have made in their lives. They beat themselves up and criticize themselves, often saying that their lives are ruined.

Most certainly there are choices that we all make that can rightly be categorized as righteous or unrighteous. And the Bible is crystal clear about the results of making the choice to obey God or to disobey (cf. 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10). If a person disobeys the commands of God, it is nothing but just and right that he suffers as a result (Deuteronomy 32:4). Sinning against God rightly brings shame (Hosea 4:7) and disgrace. The rich man who was unrighteous at the time of his death was in torments and anguish as he cried for mercy (Luke 16:19-31). Can you imagine his regret?

For those who have chosen to live as Christians, the decision to think and behave righteously has already been made. However, regarding the many personal judgment decisions we make in life that are not in the realm of what God has commanded or forbidden, we make those using the information, experience, and intentions we possess at that moment. Our lives then proceed in the way that they do, to a great extent, based upon our choices. We may then be happy or unhappy with the result. At times when we become unhappy, we charge ourselves with making a "bad" decision. We start beating ourselves up and spend time imagining a happy result had we chosen another path. For the Christian, lamenting these kinds of choices and imagined outcomes is a waste of time and energy. It is not the reality of who you are at this moment in time, and you cannot change the past. You cannot revisit that decision; it is a result of who you were in that moment. Please stop the futility of inflicting suffering upon yourself. Self-torture destroys peace of mind.

Recall the words of our brother Paul: "Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 3:13-14). We are to live as Paul, a runner with his eyes fixed on the goal. Press forward to the end of the race. Stretch forward in gaining Christ, being found in Him, knowing and loving Him, and attaining to the resurrection. We cannot afford to allow the things that are behind us to hinder our progress in any way. The goal of the prize is too precious for that. There are things we must forget! There are things we must leave behind. We dare not allow the past to dominate the present. We cannot run this race effectively by constantly looking over our shoulders. We take our eyes off the goal when we do.

Some decisions and choices we make do not bring what we envision. When unwanted outcomes result, let us regard them as lessons learned. Let us use such times for personal growth. Let us press forward, not stopping to do battle with our personal history and old choices. Offer some compassion to yourself. Bring the best of your experiences and the wisdom you receive from God to help others with goodness. Press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus!

- Gary Smalley

* "You will never get lost on the straight and narrow road!"

* "The Christ we will not share we cannot keep!"

* "Most people are carrying more luggage than they will ever get through the gate of heaven!"

* "Don't be yourself, but be what you ought to be!"

* "Atheism never wrote a line that was comforting on a death bed!"

What Must I Do To Be Saved?

HEAR THE GOSPEL

(Romans 10:14-17; John 20:30-31; Romans 1:15-17)

BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST

(Acts 8:37; John 8:24; Hebrews 11:6)

REPENT OF PAST SINS

(Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; Acts 17:30)

CONFESS CHRIST

(Romans 10:9-10; Acts 8:37)

BE BAPTIZED

(Romans 6:3-4; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38; Acts 8:36-39; 1 Peter 3:21)

LIVE A FAITHFUL LIFE

(Revelation 2:10; 2 Peter 1:5-11; John 15:1-8; Hebrews 10:23-25)