

GRACE – THE BLESSING TO KEEP GODS LAW

A Biblical and Expositional Study of Jude 1:4 and the Abuse of Christian Liberty

Introduction: The Ancient Warning

One of the most urgent crises facing the early Christian church did not come from external physical persecution, violent Roman emperors, or hostile cultural critics. Instead, it emerged from within the camp. Secretly, from inside the fellowship, smooth-talking teachers began subtly twisting the foundational gospel message. They took the beautiful, liberating truth of God's unearned favor and weaponized it into a theological cover story for personal sin, immorality, and active rebellion.

The short, intense New Testament Epistle of Jude stands as an emergency siren raised against this exact internal infiltration. At the very center of his letter, Jude explains the specific nature of this spiritual threat. He writes that certain individuals had blended into local fellowships while teaching a doctrine that claimed God's absolute mercy excused, or even endorsed, a lifestyle dominated by personal self-will and moral compromise.

To unpack this profound distortion, this study will carefully examine the text of Jude 1:4, define its historical terms, explore parallel warnings written by the Apostles Paul and Peter, and establish the biblical definition of true grace. Through a systematic look across the scriptures—quoted exclusively from the Authorized King James Version—we will discover why using God's grace as a license to perform our own will is a total perversion of salvation itself.

1. The Anatomy of Jude 1:4

To fully grasp the magnitude of Jude's warning, we must examine the verse piece by piece. Jude 1:4 lays out a precise sequence showing how these false teachers operated, what their background was, how they corrupted the gospel, and who they ultimately rejected. The verse reads as follows:

Jude 1:4 - "For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ."

The Subtle Infiltration: "Crept in unawares"

Jude does not describe an open, honest theological debate. The phrase "crept in unawares" indicates a quiet, deceptive entry. These individuals did not march in under a banner of rebellion; instead, they adopted the language, outward appearance, and vocabulary of genuine Christians. They sat in the pews, attended fellowship meals, and built personal relationships, slowly leaking their toxic ideas into the church without setting off early alarms.

The Predetermined Verdict: "Before of old ordained to this condemnation"

Lest the early church believe God had been caught by surprise, Jude quickly notes that these subversives were "before of old ordained to this condemnation." God's prophetic word had long ago established that anyone who corrupts divine truth will face absolute justice. From Old Testament patterns of judgment down through the specific warnings spoken by Jesus Himself, history had already signed and sealed the ultimate verdict awaiting these deceptive leaders.

The True Character: "Ungodly men"

Regardless of how polished their speaking style or how deep their apparent spirituality, Jude strips away the facade, using the stark label "ungodly men." An ungodly person is not merely someone who lacks religious habits; rather, it refers to a heart that lacks genuine fear, reverence, or respect for God. Their desires are entirely human-centered and self-serving.

The Core Deviation: "Turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness"

Here lies the exact theological pivot point of the deception. The word "lasciviousness" (derived from the Greek *aselgeia*) refers to unbridled sensuality, shameless conduct, excess, and a complete absence of moral restraint. It is sin committed without a conscience, entirely out in the open, with zero regard for decency.

These teachers were taking the concept of God's free, unmerited favor and declaring that because grace is free, extensive, and certain, it essentially provides a blank check to satisfy any carnal desire. In short, they used the cross of Christ to justify their own selfish will.

The Ultimate Rejection: "Denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ"

Jude concludes the verse by revealing the unavoidable fruit of this mindset. When a person twists grace into an excuse to fulfill their own will, they are "denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ." The word used for Lord here highlights absolute ownership and legal authority. You cannot accept Jesus as your Savior while totally rejecting His right to rule your life as Lord. To claim His grace while running your own life by your own laws is an absolute denial of His authority.

2. Historical Context: Antinomianism Defined

The dangerous error Jude describes is not a historical relic of the first century. Throughout church history, this theological corruption has been formally identified as Antinomianism. This word comes from two Greek words: *anti* (meaning "against") and *nomos* (meaning "law"). Literally, it means to be "against the law."

In a practical sense, an antinomian believes that because Christians are saved by faith alone and covered entirely by God's infinite grace, they are completely exempt from any moral obligations, ethical codes, or divine commands. They reason along these lines:

- God loves to show mercy and forgive sin.

- The more I sin, the more opportunities God has to show how wonderful His forgiveness is.
- Therefore, my personal behavior does not matter, and I can freely do my own will.

This toxic logic effectively transforms God's mercy into a spiritual protective bubble for sin. It allows an individual to indulge their worldly passions while completely neutralizing any healthy sense of conviction or godly grief. It is the ultimate expression of self-will masked as deep spiritual insight.

3. The Pauline Defense: Romans and Galatians

The Apostle Paul spent a massive portion of his public ministry fighting this exact misinterpretation. Because Paul was the champion of preaching salvation by grace alone through faith alone—completely apart from human works—his critics frequently accused him of promoting a lawless lifestyle. In response, Paul provided some of the most detailed and definitive arguments against the abuse of grace found in the entire New Testament.

The Standard of Romans 6

In his masterpiece letter to the Roman church, Paul anticipates the natural, corrupted human reaction to the gospel of free grace. He asks the question directly:

Romans 6:1-2 - "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?"

Paul's answer is immediate, sharp, and non-negotiable: "God forbid." In the original language, this is the strongest possible negative disclaimer available. Paul does not say, "Well, that would be highly unwise." He says it is absolutely unthinkable.

He explains the spiritual mechanics of salvation to prove his point. A true believer has been united with Jesus Christ in His death and resurrection. To say that a Christian can happily continue living in regular, deliberate sin to get more grace is a total misunderstanding of identity. A dead man cannot keep participating in the things that killed him. True grace doesn't change God's mind about sin; it changes the believer's relationship to sin.

The Reminder of Romans 6:15

Paul knew human nature would try to find a loophole, so a few verses later he restates the question using slightly different words:

Romans 6:15 - "What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid."

Being "under grace" does not mean living in a lawless wild-west where anything goes. Rather, being under grace means a believer has been delivered from the heavy penalty and condemnation of the law, and given a brand-new heart that loves righteousness. Grace is the power that frees us from sin, not the permission slip that traps us back in it.

Liberty is Not an Opportunity for Self-Will

Writing to the churches in Galatia, Paul had to deal with two extremes: legalism (trying to earn salvation by rules) and libertinism (using salvation as an excuse to sin). Addressing the latter, he issues a powerful warning:

Galatians 5:13 - "For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another."

Notice how Paul defines true Christian "liberty." It is a beautiful call to freedom, but it contains a strict boundary line: "only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh." The word "occasion" here refers to a launchpad, a base of military operations, or a convenient excuse. Paul is stating that our freedom in Christ must never be transformed into a license to serve our own sinful nature, appetites, or independent human will. True freedom is found in loving service to God and our fellow man, not in reckless self-indulgence.

4. Peter's Warning: Freedom vs. Enslavement

The Apostle Peter aligns perfectly with Jude and Paul, writing severe warnings to the early believers about the catastrophic danger of using grace as a cover-up for dark motives.

The Cover-Up Exposed

In his first epistle, Peter shows how easily human hearts can slide into using spiritual truths to mask wicked behavior:

1 Peter 2:16 - "As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God."

The word "cloke" literally means a mask, a veil, or a covering. Peter is warning against the hypocrisy of putting on the beautiful garment of Christian liberty while using it underneath to hide a heart full of "maliciousness"—wickedness, spite, and self-will. True grace makes a person transparent and pure; it does not give them a sophisticated theological mask to hide behind while they do whatever they want in secret.

The False Promises of Lawless Teachers

In his second epistle, Peter provides an incredibly detailed profile of the exact same false teachers Jude confronts in his letter. Peter exposes the tragic irony of their message:

2 Peter 2:19 - "While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage."

These corrupt leaders gained popularity by preaching a message that sounded incredibly attractive on the surface: "You are completely free! Don't let anyone impose rules or restrictions on you! Follow your heart and your own desires; grace has covered it all!" But Peter pulls back the curtain on this fake gospel. He shows that while they promise a grand illusion of liberty, they themselves are actually helpless slaves to moral decay. The spiritual law of reality is absolute: whatever controls and overcomes a person, to that very thing they are entirely enslaved.

5. The True Ministry of Grace: Titus 2:11-12

To completely dismantle the false idea that grace allows us to live according to our own self-will, we must look at how the Bible defines the actual character and function of grace. What does grace actually do when it enters a human life? The most concise, complete answer to this question is found in Paul's letter to Titus, where he lays out the comprehensive curriculum of God's grace:

Titus 2:11-12 - "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;"

According to the Holy Scriptures, grace is not a passive cloud of generic forgiveness. Grace is an active, living teacher. And notice carefully what grace teaches us:

1. It teaches us what to deny: "denying ungodliness and worldly lusts."
2. It teaches us how to live: "we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world."

True grace does not look at ungodliness and say, "Don't worry about it, I've got it covered." True grace looks at ungodliness and commands us to deny it. It gives the believer the internal desire, supernatural strength, and clear wisdom to walk away from worldly lusts and instead live a life characterized by self-control ("soberly"), moral excellence ("righteously"), and absolute devotion ("godly"). Therefore, if a person claims to have experienced the grace of God, yet their life is completely characterized by an unrepentant pursuit of their own worldly will, they are claiming a counterfeit grace.

6. Lip Service vs. Obedience: The Words of Christ

Ultimately, this entire discussion brings us face-to-face with the words of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. The dangerous theology of Jude 1:4—using God's name to justify a life of self-directed lawlessness—is precisely what Jesus warned against during His famous Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew 7:21-23 - "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

This passage is one of the most sobering in all of Scripture. Jesus describes individuals who possess excellent religious vocabulary; they repeat His name ("Lord, Lord") and can even list impressive spiritual credentials and public achievements done in His name. Yet, their ultimate destination is exclusion from the kingdom of God. Why? Because while their lips claimed His authority, their lives were dedicated to their own will instead of "the will of my Father which is in heaven." Jesus labels these individuals as those who "work iniquity." The Greek word used for iniquity is *anomia*, which literally means lawlessness—living as if there are no rules, no

accountability, and no master besides oneself. They wanted the benefits of Christ's name while continuing to operate as the sole kings of their own lives.

Conclusion: Contending Earnestly for the Faith

When we place Jude 1:4 alongside the complete witness of the New Testament, the message becomes unmistakably clear: God's grace is an unmatched power for personal transformation, not a theological loophole for moral compromise. To take the agonizing sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross and turn it into a convenient excuse to do our own will is an absolute insult to the holiness and love of God.

As Jude reminds us immediately before this verse, believers must "earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 1:3). Part of that earnest contention means fiercely protecting the purity of the gospel. We must guard our hearts against the subtle, dangerous whisper that tells us our choices do not matter, that obedience is optional, or that grace is a license to sin.

The true gospel offers something infinitely better than a fake freedom to follow our broken human will. It offers real freedom from the crushing power of sin, a new heart that finds joy in the will of the Father, and an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ, who is not only our Savior but our absolute Master and Lord.