



FEED MY SHEEP

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Grace for the Race

Part 4: The key objection to grace vis à vis universal salvation

We are continuing our studies on the doctrine of grace. We left off last time by learning the meaning of *prevenient* grace. Based on Ephesians 2:5, we stated: Before a person can even *begin* the spiritual journey, he first must be made alive or quickened as it says in verse 5. So by the grace of God, His Holy Spirit made us spiritually alive, He quickened our spirit to the tiniest degree, just enough so that by the grace of God, we could perceive that we are sinners in a lost condition.

This is what is meant by *prevenient* grace. From the Latin *pre-* meaning “before” and the verb *venire*, to “come.” This is the grace that comes before anything else. It is the grace that awakens us spiritually so that we are even capable of responding to the next level of grace which will give us an awareness of our lost condition. *Prevenient* grace comes first.

Then, by the unmerited favor of God, that is to say, by the grace of God, the Holy Spirit *causes* us to desire a way out of this dreadful predicament. That is when the Spirit of God in a further display of grace orchestrated events so that we came across the Word of God and the gospel message, the good news that Jesus had paid the penalty for our sins and that by simply acknowledging our condition and accepting the work that Jesus has already done for us, that we can receive the gift of eternal life.

So it was God’s *prevenient* grace which first came upon us when we were dead and it enabled us to be made conscious of our condition. Then when we come to accept by faith the completed work of Jesus Christ, that is what is called *justifying* grace. Paul writes in....

Romans 3:24 Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:

You could also call that “saving” grace, although technically, all grace is saving grace, but this refers to our initial salvation experience, what many fundamentalists and evangelicals term “getting saved,” or becoming “born again.” Theologically, the initial “getting saved” is called our *justification*. Thus we can accurately proclaim that we *have been* saved.

Then we enter our Christian walk, our *sanctification* phase, where we *are being* saved. This is the phase where, as the Bible says, “we work out our own salvation with fear and trembling.” “Uh, James,” someone might say, “are you sure our works aren’t part of our salvation?” I am sure... and I will answer that later.

This grace which is given to us during our Christian walk (i.e., after our justification) is, not surprisingly, called “sanctifying grace.” It is the grace given for every possible circumstance and

situation that a Christian will ever face. It is enabling grace.

If the challenge is overwhelming, God gives overwhelming grace. If it is a continuing challenge, He gives continuing grace. If it is a momentary need; God gives momentary grace. Whatever the need, we can rest assured with Paul when God told him in the midst of a continuing trial that “my grace is sufficient for thee.”

One of the many places where the Scripture speaks of sanctifying grace is:

Acts 20:32 And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.

Here it is specifically stated that this is grace for edifying and strengthening, for building up. Let me move on now to address more specifically the relationship between grace and works, or grace and the law, if you prefer.

License

Since I have been teaching the restitution of all things (aka universal reconciliation, or universal salvation), a number of people have written to me objecting with the idea that “Well, if everybody is going to get saved eventually anyway, why try to live a Christian life? Why be good? Why not go out and just sin up a storm, just sin like the devil since we all get saved anyway?”

I answered that at length in one of the lectures in my series on Universal Reconciliation. But it is really basically the same objection made concerning God’s grace. (And that’s not surprising, because after all, and as we have stated numerous times, the whole doctrine of God’s grace towards us is based on the Old Testament law of jubilee, and that same law of jubilee is itself one of the bases of universal reconciliation.)

The objection to God’s grace can be stated

like this: “Well, if you tell me that all my efforts to lead a Christian life, going to church and being obedient to the laws of God and all that, if all my work will never earn me one blessing, then I’m afraid I’ll just quit trying. And after all, aren’t we supposed to work for rewards in heaven?”

We would answer: absolutely. The rewards in the kingdom of heaven *are* earned, and we *do* “earn” blessings after we are saved; but... we must understand the vital truth that whatever we have “earned” is only because God gave us the grace both to desire to do it and to actually do whatever it is that “earns” the reward or blessing.

And this is not contradicting anything I said earlier. It is a matter of understanding who is really responsible and who therefore gets the credit for any good work that any of us does.

There is no room for apathy and do-nothing’s in the economy of God’s grace. Nor is there any excuse for deliberate sin because God’s grace will cover it. *Grace does not give us a license to sin. Grace does not give us a license to break the laws of God.*

At its best, taking license in deliberate sin is a misunderstanding of God’s grace, and at its worst, it is an abuse of God’s grace. And God knew this misunderstanding and abuse would arise and so he had Jude warn against those who would use grace as an excuse to sin. Jude writes:

Jude 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 [license], and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Some years ago I was with a preacher and he and I were entrusted with some material goods belonging to another, and during the course of our oversight of these goods, he proposed that we avail ourselves of the material we were entrusted with. He said to me “Let’s go ahead and sin; we

can always confess it later.”

Now it matters not whether the value of the item was a nickel or \$1000, the point is that out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaketh. It was the attitude of the abuse of grace that rather stunned me.

Now this incident could have been construed to have been meant in a joking manner, since the value of the material goods was very minimal—a few bucks at most; but I remember wondering at the time: if you joke about this and then go ahead and do it, I wonder if that carries over into other areas of your life.

The apostle Paul wrote the entire sixth chapter of Romans to counter this possibility of misunderstanding or abusing the sovereign grace of God. Why did he write a whole chapter about it? Because he knew he would be open to that criticism because of what he had just written in chapter 5. Things like verse 21:

Romans 5:20 Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound:

He knew that some people would be thinking that same objection: well, what the heck, if every time you sin, there is ample grace in forgiveness, then why not revel in sin? And so Paul answered:

Romans 6:1 What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?

2 God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?

You can read and study the rest of the chapter on your own, but I would say this: I want to commend those who have presented these types of objections or who have pondered these things in their minds because I believe that *unless you do arrive at that objection at some point in your thinking, then you have really not yet understood grace.*

Perhaps it is this fear of that possibility of abusing grace that causes some of us to perceive the doctrine of grace as a doctrine of works, at least that’s how it works out in practice in our lives.

The late Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, one of the pre-eminent British divines of the just-past century addressed the objection this way in a question and answer session. He said:

“The true preaching of the gospel of salvation by grace alone always leads to the possibility of this charge being brought against it. *There is no better test as to whether a man is preaching the New Testament gospel of salvation than this*, that some people might misunderstand it and misinterpret it to mean that it really amounts to this, that because you are saved by grace alone, it doesn’t matter at all what you do; you can go on sinning as much as you like because it will redound all the more to the glory of grace.”

Of course, Dr. Jones was not suggesting that we deliberately obfuscate the presentation of the gospel, but if it is presented correctly, then people ought to come up with that objection. We know they should because the apostle Paul certainly presented it correctly and he anticipated that objection.

When Martin Luther and the other Reformers lit a fire across Europe with that same proclamation of salvation by grace alone, they were roasted for it; some of them literally. But my friends, it is the truth of the gospel.

In a small way compared to the Reformers, our ministry has also been figuratively roasted for teaching the truth about grace (via the laws of jubilee) and how it inevitably results in the salvation of all! But because of these trials, small though they are in comparison, we nonetheless, have been learning to trust in His grace and His grace alone.

I have often in the past couple of years been brought to the point where I could see no way out

of a predicament/trial and tribulation, and each and every time, God has met our need with His grace. And I confess that sometimes, I have had to repent for doubting that His grace would be sufficient.

As we proceed in some of our forthcoming studies to learn more about the fruits of the Spirit, I want us to understand that we do strive to put into practice the fruits of godliness, patience, humility, etc. not because we thereby *earn* the right, or put God in our debt so that He must answer our prayers as we wish.

We work for no other reason except that we want to please our heavenly Father. We do good works out of love and gratitude for His great mercy and love, not out of a sense of duty or legalism or drudgery. We do good works because He foreordained that we should.

Ephesians 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto [meaning: for the purpose of, or so that we might do] good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

We work to establish the fruits of the Spirit in us because we realize that it is really not us working at all but God in us. It is He and His grace who enables us to do whatever good works we do. Paul said it two distinct ways.

1 Corinthians 15:10 But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which *was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.*

And when he told the believers at Philippi to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling, he added another clause which gave them the reason why. I will close with this charge to you and to myself:

Philippians 2:12 Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence,

work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

13 For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of *his* good pleasure.

The next time we hear or join in singing that glorious old hymn, *Amazing Grace*, I trust that we will now have a new or better understanding and appreciation of the sovereign grace of our Father—grace by which we not only were saved and will be saved, but also grace by which we are being saved daily in our Christian walk. So let us live by grace. Amen.

(End of this study on grace.)

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