

Gospel and Perfecting Holiness — 3

(Misunderstanding Grace)

Outline

1. The false concept of grace
2. The true concept of grace

1. The false concept of grace

The false concept begins correctly but needs to go further. It has a measure of truth but needs more of it. It is very dangerous because it has the potential to produce bad fruit. If you ask Christians to define grace, many will say the following:

- Grace is undeserved or unmerited favour from God to believers.
- Grace is God's way of giving us salvation through Christ.

Though correct, these definitions do not progress to the full potential of God's grace. It often ends in serious error because **grace can be a big cover-up** over rebellion and wilful disobedience to God's revealed will. Many Christians are stuck in wilful disobedience and think they are covered by grace. If you ask them about their Christian walk, they will say they are not living as they should, but they carry on by the grace of God.

A classic case concerns the modern fashion of many unmarried couples who live with each other, profess they are Christians and attend church. Terry Virgo, a founding pastor of the New Frontier Group of Churches, had given an example of a pastor who asked Terry whether he should treat these couples under the Law or grace. In the pastor's mind, the Law forbids the lifestyle of such couples. Still, he thinks grace permits a big cover-up of their wilful disobedience because both man and woman were professing Christians. That pastor is in serious error because he should realise **grace sets a higher standard than the Law**.

Grace sets a higher standard than the Law.

Consider *Matt 5: 21-22, 27-28*. The first part of the couplet quotes the Law, which came from Moses, but Jesus quotes the second part, from whom came grace and truth (*John 1:14, 17*). Consider the following:

v21: *"Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment" (Law)*

v22: *"But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment" (Jesus' standard of grace).*

v27: *"You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' (Law)*

v28: *But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart (Jesus' standard of grace).*

So, you can see that Jesus' standard of grace is much higher than the external standard of the Law. Why is

grace the higher standard? — It empowers you to perfect holiness in your life and not live a hypocritical life of external forms. If you do not use the full potential of grace, especially grace that leads to holiness, it will not produce the fruit God has in store for you. **And God will judge you by your fruit.** Today there are so many Christians in Bible-believing churches living in wilful sin, thinking that the grace of God covers them. Their thinking is wrong. They live by the false concept of grace — that grace is the big cover-up of their wilful disobedience.

God judges us by our work/fruit.

Peter 1:17 Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear.

As Evangelical Christians, we believe in the Gospel. We know that we are saved by God's gift of grace through faith and not by works so that no one can boast (*Eph 2:8-9*). If we are truly saved by faith, then we are justified and receive the righteousness of God within us (*2 Cor 5:21*). This righteousness of God comes with a new heart and a new spirit within us that causes us to walk in the ways of God (*Ezk 36:26-27*) — in other words, we will bear the good fruit of holiness. Furthermore, we become a child of God, and we can call God "Abba Father". But your heavenly Father is also your judge. He is impartial. He will judge your work done on earth and the fruit of your life on earth, and you will be rewarded accordingly.

Some people make the sinner's prayer, but their lives don't change at all. There is no transformation. They are not born again. They are not Christians. James says the evidence that a person is genuinely a Christian saved by faith is when his lifestyle shows it (*James 2:19*). But if a person continuously bears bad fruit, then one wonders whether that person is truly a Christian.

2. The true concept of grace

When we have faith in God's grace that comes through Jesus Christ, we are open to God's power which is **"Divine power for everything we need for life and godliness"** (*2 Pet 1:3*).

Titus 2:11-14 For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. ¹² It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, ¹³ while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

Therefore, we have the grace to enable us to live beyond our ability for everything we need for life and godliness. *Titus 2:11-14* are powerful verses that concisely describe the effect grace should have on believers in the gospel. Grace is more than giving instruction. When we read or hear God's word, then grace uses God's word to "teach us", which includes encouraging, training, correcting, and disciplining us to reject ungodliness and leading us to holier living. (*2 Tim 3:16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness*).

Grace is certainly not a big-cover-up. If we are not producing the fruit of perfecting holiness, we use God's grace in vain.

But, with God's grace empowering us and training us, we can genuinely say, "Thanks be to God who **always leads us in His triumph in Christ**" (*2 Cor 2:14*). Therefore, with His grace, we will stand in victory over darkness in every sphere of personal activity — whether it is in our personal life (purity) social life (relationship with others) and in our business life (integrity when dealing with money). If we are stuck in wilful sin and make little effort to be free, either we are not born again or receive God's grace in vain. Paul urges (or pleads) with the Christians in Corinth that they should not receive God's grace in vain. It will grieve God.

Cor 6:1 *As God's fellow workers, we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain.*