

GRACE AND OBEDIENCE

(by George Battey)

“Grace” means “unmerited favor” and that simply means undeserved favor. The Bible teaches that men are saved by grace (Eph 2:8). This means no one can live so flawlessly and so perfectly so as to deserve eternal life in heaven. No one deserves to go to heaven because “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23).

The grace of God makes it possible for imperfect people to go to heaven. People who have messed up their lives, who deserve only punishment, have hope because of the grace of God. His grace makes it possible for even the worst person to be forgiven and have another opportunity to go to heaven.

Here are some things every person needs to know about the grace of God:

1) Grace is not free for God.

While grace means people freely receive a favor from God, this does not mean grace is totally free to everyone concerned. Grace cost God something. Remember the old saying, “There ain’t no such thing as a free lunch.” This means, that while one person may have received a free lunch, another person *did* have to pay for it.

While grace is free to you and me, it did cost somebody something. It cost God the death of His only begotten Son. “But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.” (Gal 4:4-5).

2) Grace is conditional.

This means grace is actually given only to people who meet certain conditions. The grace of God is available for all the world: “For *the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men*, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age.” (Tit 2:11-12). According to this, God’s saving grace is offered to all men, but not all men will be saved. Most will be lost according to what Jesus said: “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. 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).

Since grace is offered to all men, and yet most men will be lost, this means salvation is not by “grace only.” If salvation were by grace only, then all men would be saved, but this is clearly not the case. Grace is conditional. To receive saving grace, a person must meet certain conditions. Many churches would agree with this, but they teach the only condition is to believe in Jesus. While this is a popular idea, it simply is not true. “You

see then that a man is justified by works, and *not by faith only.*” (Ja 2:24). This is the only place in the entire Bible that uses the term “faith only” and clearly the passage states men are *not* saved by faith only. In addition to faith, God has attached the conditions of repentance (Lk 13:3), confession (Rom 10:10), and water baptism. “He who believes *and* is baptized will be saved.” (Mk 16:16). Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born *of water* and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” (Jn 3:5). “Repent, and let every one of you *be baptized* in the name of Jesus Christ *for the remission of sins.*” (Acts 2:38).

3) Grace is not a license to continue sinning.

This means that even after someone has been saved by God’s grace (His unmerited favor) this person must continue to obey God’s word. Salvation by grace is conditional from start to finish! “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?” (Rom 6:1-2).

Men cannot ignore God’s law and simply say, “It doesn’t matter whether we obey or not because God’s grace will take care of us.” We cannot test God’s patience like this. Making a mistake and asking God to forgive us is one thing, but to purposefully neglect His revealed will and to purposefully violate what is written is to “sin willfully.” The Bible says: “For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins.” (Heb 10:26).

When we, the members of the church of Christ, preach to people about the need to worship and serve God according to the scriptures, we are not suggesting that men should try to “*earn salvation.*” It is impossible to earn salvation. We have all sinned and we all need grace. But, this does not mean we may therefore purposefully ignore the law of God and expect that His grace will cover willful rebellion. “If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.” (1 Jn 1:6).