

GRACE AND WORKS

- A. Introduction: We're working on a series about Jesus—Who He is, why He came to earth, and what message He preached—according to the Bible. Jesus warned us that prior to His second coming there will be religious deception, specifically false Christs and prophets. Matt 24:4-5; 11; 23-24
1. At Jesus' return, the world will be under the leadership of a ruler who is empowered by Satan. This man will be offered to humanity as Satan's Antichrist or in place of Christ. This ruler will preside over a false Christianity more tolerant and inclusive than biblical Christianity. II Thess 2:8-10; Rev 13; etc.
 - a. This particular circumstance won't come out of a vacuum. Circumstances have been heading in this direction for some time. We are witnessing increasing misrepresentations of who Jesus is, why He came to earth, and what message He preached—even among those who profess to be Christians.
 - b. So, we are heeding Jesus' warning to "be not deceived (Matt 24:4) by taking time to look at the real Jesus—Jesus who is revealed in the pages of Scripture—so that we won't be deceived. Ps 91:4
 2. In the last lesson we began to discuss the fact that in recent years there has been a huge explosion in teaching on grace in the Church. While some of it is good, much of it is inaccurate and has led to wrong conclusions being drawn by those unfamiliar with sound Bible teaching.
 - a. Grace has become an excuse for sin in some circles (Jude 4; II Pet 2:1-2). It's becoming more and more common to hear of professing "Christians" who ignore what the Bible says about living holy lives because "we're under grace not Law" and "God's not mad at us any more".
 - b. Those statements are misinterpretations of what the Bible says about grace, Law, and God's wrath, and they play right into the development of a more "tolerant" Christianity. I've compared what is happening to the game of telephone. (Most of us played it as children.)
 1. Everyone sits in a circle and a statement is whispered into the ear of the first person who then whispers it to the person next to him—and so on and so forth—moving all the way around the circle until the message has been passed to everyone. The fun of the game is seeing how distorted the message is by the end of the circle.
 2. Sincere men of God have taught some things about grace, Law, and God's wrath which aren't fully accurate and their errors have been misstated and further warped as the message spreads—Daddy God loves us and wants us to be happy. Therefore, He'd never tell us not to do something that makes us happy. It's all about grace.
 3. In this lesson we're going to continue to look at what the Bible says about grace. When we are familiar with the genuine message, it is easy to recognize error.
- B. To rightly understand grace we must consider it in terms of the big picture—why God created us, what life is all about, and what our ultimate destiny is.
1. Eph 1:4-5—God created us to become His holy, righteous sons and daughters through faith in Christ. His intention was and is that we live in loving relationship with Him as we reflect His glory to the world around us: (We) [have been destined and appointed] to live for the praise of His glory (Eph 1:12, Amp).
 - a. Sin thwarted the plan. When Adam sinned, men became sinners by nature. Sin disqualified us for our created purpose. A holy God cannot have sinners as sons and daughters. Rom 5:19; Eph 2:3
 - b. Jesus came—not to make it okay to sin, not to make it so that God no longer cares if we sin—but to abolish sin through the sacrifice of Himself. Jesus came to pay for sin by the sacrifice of Himself and make it possible for sinners to be transformed sons and daughters of God. Heb 9:26; John 1:12
 - c. Jesus came into this world to save sinners from sin, from its penalty (eternal separation from God) and its power, so God's plan to have holy, righteous sons and daughters can be realized. I Tim 1:15
 2. II Tim 1:9—Paul (an eyewitness of the resurrected Lord Jesus who was personally taught the gospel that he preached by Jesus) wrote that God has saved us according to His own purpose and grace which was

given us in Christ before the world began (we'll discuss the phrase "not according to our works" in a moment). For now, consider these points:

- a. God has called us to a holy calling according to His own purpose which was given to us before the world began (sonship, relationship, glory). Note—it's **His** purpose. **Our** purpose is **His** purpose. He saved us from sin for His purposes. We've made it all about us when it's all about Him.
 1. Contemporary Christianity is very self-focused. However, Jesus died so that we would no longer live for ourselves, but for Him. II Cor 5:15
 2. The church has been influenced by 20th century western world principles. Much of the popular preaching sounds like the motivational seminars you find in corporate America: Jesus came to help you be the best you can be so that you can fulfill your dreams and your destiny—meaning success and prosperity in this life. But there's nothing like that in the New Testament.
 - A. Popular misrepresentations about Jesus in contemporary Christianity play right into inaccurate teachings about grace.
 - B. If Jesus came to earth to give us a good life, make us happy, and help us fulfill our dreams, then He'd never tell us not to do something that makes us happy—even if some judgmental people think that this behavior is sinful. After all, we're under grace now!
 - b. God has saved us and called us according to His grace. Almighty God created humans beings knowing that we would choose independence from Him through sin disqualifying us for sonship.
 1. All men are guilty of sin before a holy God and deserve punishment (eternal separation from God in Hell). There is nothing we can do to rectify our situation.
 2. God's heart was not, it is not, to punish men, but to accomplish His purpose for men (sonship, relationship, glory). Our sin provided an opportunity for God to demonstrate something wonderful and beautiful in His character—namely grace.
 - A. Grace is the unearned, undeserved favor that God shows in saving us from sin and its penalty through the Cross of Christ.
 1. Rom 5:6—While we were yet in weakness—powerless to help ourselves—at the fitting time Christ died for (in behalf of) the ungodly. (Amp)
 2. Eph 2:5—[For] it is by grace—by His favor and mercy which you did not deserve—that you are saved (delivered from judgment and made partakers of Christ's salvation). (Amp)
 - B. Mercy assumes need on the part of him who receives it, and resources adequate to meet the need on the part of the one who shows it (*Vines' Dictionary*). Through His grace displayed at the Cross, God has met our greatest need—salvation from our sins.
 3. God's grace has been expressed toward us to provide what is needed to completely deliver us from sin (its penalty and its power) and then transform us into the kinds of sons and daughters that Almighty God originally planned to have—righteous, holy, and blameless. Grace is first and foremost about restoring us to our created purpose through faith in Christ and His sacrifice.
- C. We need to introduce another word into our discussion at this point—works. This term is coupled with the grace in the New Testament. It's important that we understand the connection between grace and works.
1. The Greek word translated works, although used in a number of ways in the New Testament, simply means work, task, or employment, deed or an act.
 - a. When works is used with grace we see this contrast: We're saved from sin by God's grace, not by our own works. II Tim 1:9; Eph 2:8-9; Titus 3:5
 1. There are two ways to receive or obtain something, by works or by grace. When you get something by works, you earn it by your efforts. It is right and just that you have it (like a paycheck).

2. Salvation is a gift from God. It has to come by His grace (gift) because there is nothing we can do to obtain salvation from, nothing we can do to deserve or earn it.
 - A. We receive it by believing the gospel (later lessons). We can't boast or take credit for a gift. The glory and praise goes to the Gift-Giver.
 - B. Eph 2:8-9—And this [salvation] is not of yourselves—of your own doing, it came not through your own striving—but it is the gift of God. It is not the result of what anyone can possibly do, so no one can pride himself on it or take glory to himself. (Amp)
- b. Let's back up and get the context of Eph 2:8-9. In v1-3 Paul reminded his readers of their condition prior to receiving the gift of salvation. They (we) were dead in trespasses and sin, following the course of this wicked world, under the sway of its wicked ruler, fulfilling the lust of their (our) mind and flesh, by nature children of wrath.
 1. Eph 2:4—“But God! So rich is He in His mercy! Because of and in order to satisfy the great and wonderful and intense love with which He loved us” (Amp); v5-6—Even when we were dead in sin, through the Cross, He made us alive with Christ, and raised us up with Him (lessons for another day). Note that in the midst of his statement, Paul reminds us that
 - A. Note, in the midst of his statement, Paul reminds us that God saved us from this condition by His grace.
 - B. Eph 2:5—[For] it is by grace—by His favor and mercy which you did not deserve—that you are saved (delivered from judgment and made partakers of Christ's salvation). (Amp)
 2. Then Paul reminded them and us why God did this. Remember the big picture: v7—So that he might display in the ages to come how immense are the riches of his grace. (NEB)
2. Titus 3:4-7—We find another statement that contrasts grace and works. God saved us, not because of any righteous work on our part, but according to His mercy and grace shed on us through Jesus.
 - a. But when God our Savior made manifest His kindness and love of men he saved us (Conybeare), not for any upright actions we had performed (Berkeley) but in fulfillment of his merciful purpose (20th Cent) by [the] cleansing (bath) of the new birth (regeneration) and renewing of the Holy Spirit (Amp).
 - b. God, motivated by love, has dealt with us in grace and mercy. He sent His Son to die for our sins and deliver us from the just and righteous penalty of our disobedience through His blood.
 1. When we acknowledge Jesus as Savior and Lord, the cleansing power of the blood of Christ wipes out the debt we owed for sin.
 - A. This opens the way for the power of the Holy Spirit to transform sinners into sons through regeneration or new birth—all made possible by God's grace.
 - B. With the cleansing power that gives us a new birth (Knox) and the renewing power of the Holy Spirit (20th Cent).
 2. Regeneration is made up of two Greek words that mean again and generation or rebirth. Renewing means to renew qualitatively. It is a renewing that makes a person different than in the past.
 - A. You were an unrighteous sinner. Now, you are a holy, righteous son or daughter of God who has a future and a hope, not just in this life but in the life to come.
 - B. And it's all because of God's grace, not because of any action you took or work you carries out to earn or merit the transformation.
3. Let's go back to Eph 2:10. In this passage the word works is used to mean something that we can do—in fact, something we are supposed to do.
 - a. In the context of his statements about God saving us by His grace, Paul wrote that through the gift (grace) of salvation we have become God's workmanship.
 1. Workmanship is the Greek word *poiema*. (We get our English word poem from it. *Poiema*

comes from a word that means to do or to make (Vines).

2. This is a reference to our new (second) birth. Through the inward transformation that has occurred we have become: His own handiwork (Weymouth); His design (Knox); For he has made us what we are (Williams).
- b. Remember, the goal of salvation is transformation which restores us to our created purpose as sons and daughters who glorify God while we live in loving relationship with Him.
1. We are now His workmanship recreated in Christ Jesus unto or “for the good actions” (20th Cent) “which God predestined us to make our daily way of life” (Montgomery); “as he prepared before hand to be the employment of our lives” (Knox).
 2. We can’t save ourselves from our sin through our works. But now that we have received the gift of salvation we are to do works—we are supposed to begin to demonstrate outward evidence of the inward change that God, by His grace, has produced in us.
- c. Go back to Titus 2:14—We find the word works again, used in the same way as in Eph 2:10. Jesus gave Himself to purify a peculiar people (as His own possession) who are zealous of good works— [people who are] eager and enthusiastic about [living a life that is good and filled with] beneficial deeds (Amp); with a zest for good works (Moffatt); eager to do right (Goodspeed).
1. Sadly, because of inaccurate teaching about grace and works, works has become almost a bad word. Works isn’t a bad word. We were created to express God’s glory through the works we do, the actions we take, the lives we live. (lessons for another day)
 2. These works don’t save us or earn us blessings from God. They are expressions of our love for Him and our understanding of why we’re here—to show Him to the world around us so that men and women can come to saving knowledge of Jesus and be restored to their created purpose through God’s grace.
 3. I Pet 2:9—But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a dedicated nation, [God’s] own purchased, special people, that you may set forth the wonderful deeds and display the virtues and perfections of Him Who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. (Amp)
- D. Conclusion: We haven’t said all that we need to say, but consider these thoughts as we bring this lesson to a good stopping point. Christianity is about restoring us to our created purpose as holy, righteous sons and daughters of God—a plan that was conceived in eternity past and will outlast this life.
1. If Jesus is your Lord and Savior, then tremendous inward changes have taken place which will begin to show up outwardly. Note the word “begin”. The birth is the beginning of a process that will ultimately make us fully pleasing to God in every thought, word, and action we take.
 2. Right now, we are finished works in progress—fully God’s holy, righteous sons and daughters, but not yet fully holy and righteous in everything we do. But that should be our goal because we understand the big picture and the ultimate purpose of salvation. I John 3:2 eager to do right (Goodspeed);-3
 - a. We’ll discuss this in more detail as we work through the series, but hopefully you’re beginning to see the two sides of grace. Grace is not an excuse to live sinfully. But when you do sin (as we all still do from time to time), because of what God, by His grace has done for you, you are not without hope. He who has begun a good work in us will complete it. Phil 1:6
 - b. God, by His grace, has purified us and is purifying us. Renewing by the Holy Ghost is a process, a progressive cleansing by the Spirit through the Word of God.
 3. II Cor 3:18—And all of us, as with unveiled face, [because we] continued to behold [in the Word of God] as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are constantly being transfigured into His very own image in ever increasing splendor and from one degree of glory to another; [for this comes] from the Lord [Who is] the Spirit. (Amp)
 4. Lots more next week!!