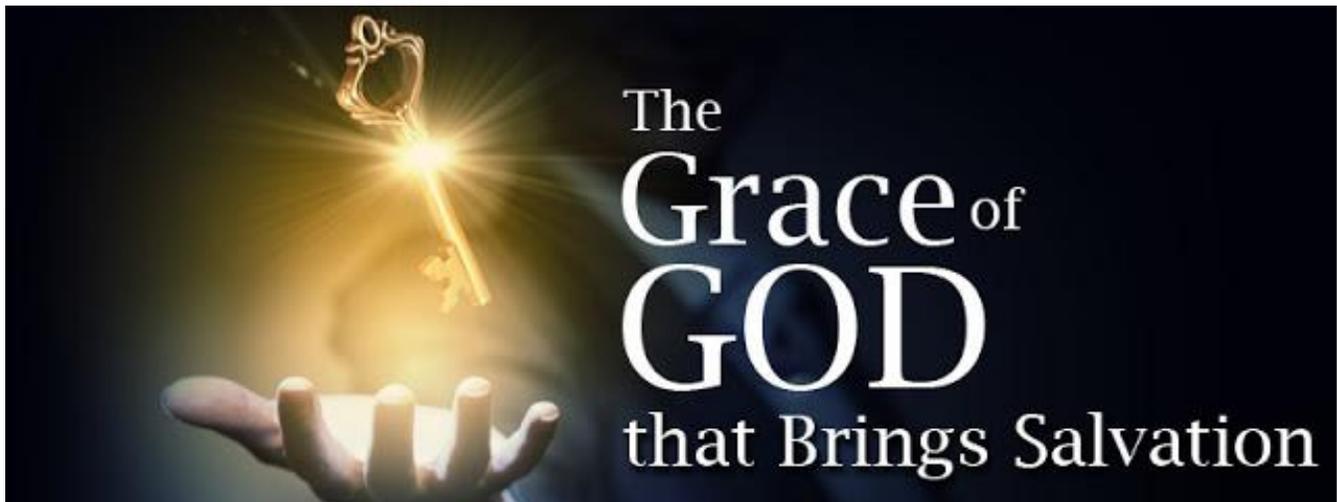


GRACE IS A GIFT OF GOD, NOT OF WORKS

By Mike Taylor



8 "Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God;

9 Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began (2nd Timothy 1:8-9)

The concept of grace is so glorious, that it's implications just escape the average man who cannot accept something so simple. Jesus said that unless you come as a little child:

3 "And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

4 Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 18:3-4)

But right away, men who view the simplicity of the concept of God's Grace can not logically process how simple the concept really is, that even a little child can understand it, as they receive it by faith.

5 "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;

6 Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour;

7 That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life." (Titus 3:5-7)

One must ask themselves what is grace? Grace is the free and unmerited favor of God, as manifested in the salvation of sinners and the bestowal of blessings. Meaning there is nothing we can do to earn it..It is a free gift. Free for the asking.

Whole denomination have come into existence trying to define something that is so simple and elementary, they feel they must define it , because some find it so hard to believe and for some, it is impossible to believe. So they complicate it until they can find it believable.

24 "But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.

25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

26 For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called:

27 But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty;

28 And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are:

29That no flesh should glory in his presence.” (1st Corinthians 1:24-28)

To the dying world, this concept is foolishness. In the previous passage, the word translated in Greek for foolish is *musterion* meaning 'a mystery'. "Confound" is from *kataischuno*, meaning to 'bring shame.' Those being confounded are "the wise" (Greek; "*sophos*" meaning, wise, worldly, sophisticated) to whom the simple concept of grace remains a mystery, even after being saved. Grace is a mystery to those who are wise in their own eyes.

Paul elaborated in his epistle to the Corinthians, but it is little more than the obvious found in Proverbs when Solomon wrote this 1000 years earlier:

15”The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise.

16A fool's wrath is presently known: but a prudent man covereth shame.

17He that speaketh truth sheweth forth righteousness: but a false witness deceit.” (Proverbs 12:15-17)

The biggest obstacle that a person who is logically trying to process this concept and trying to understand the simplicity of “grace” is they tend to see it from their perspective. But we are the recipients of grace, not the Author of it. When viewed from God's perspective, it doesn't look the same. To receive such a blessing, a person must have wisdom. But how does one get wisdom?

The Bible defines wisdom as thinking God's way and reminds us that it is through wisdom that one gains understanding.

"For the LORD giveth wisdom: out of His mouth cometh knowledge and understanding." (Proverbs 2:6)

"Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding." (Proverbs 4:7)

Do you see what those verses say? The Lord gives us wisdom...we can't be wise on our own. He gives us the ability to come to faith through wisdom which HE SUPPLIES...and give us the faith to believe WHICH HE SUPPLIES....

“No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. (John 6:44)...

That is God supplied wisdom and faith to see our need for a Savior.

THE END OF THIS AGE

So why is there so much discord among different denominations of brethren over this one simple, single topic? I believe men look unto themselves and fall into what must be labeled the pride of man.

3 “For the wicked boasteth of his heart's desire, and blesseth the covetous, whom the LORD abhorreth.

4The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts.” (Psalms 10:3-4)

"Only by pride cometh contention: but with the well advised is wisdom." (Proverbs 13:10)

I believe this is a sign of the end of the days we live in. We are living in the latter days before the return of our Lord Jesus Christ, and it is prophesied it would be so.

1 “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils;

2Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron;” (1st Timothy 4:1-2)

Two of the most seductive spirits to a Christian is the spirit of legalism, and another is beholding to the “doctrines of men” they call them “traditions”. To put them both in the most simplest form of definition, the first being legalism, it the attempt to live a life pleasing to God by keeping the principles found in the Laws in the Old Testament.

The second is to adhere to a set of man-made doctrines that put a person in bondage to their denomination by keeping certain works of traditions to maintain your salvation. Both are based on salvation by works, not upon grace.

This is to say, we are saved by grace through faith, but now in the former we must keep certain laws to maintain our salvation by adhering to the same law by which we were condemned. And on the flip side of the coin, those who hold to traditions of men, feel they must keep man made laws to keep their salvation intact. I have actually had people tell me, "I can't be saved unless I belong to this church" ..or that church, or this denomination. These "churches" that foster this type of doctrines, demand allegiance to them, instead of to God. For without doing what your church says is of God, in their minds, makes them a cast away from God's grace and the blessings of this "church."

It is seductive because it *sounds* true. It suits our logic. It follows our own understanding. It redirects our trust towards something more tangible than in an invisible God and an ancient Sacrifice. We look to works, traditions, and human based endeavors.

First, speaking of the law, we know the law -- look at the list of things that are forbidden to Christians. Everybody's list is different, but we ALL have a list. You don't think so?

Ever hear of a Christian being arrested for some heinous crime and wonder if the guy was really a Christian? "How could he be a Christian and do that?" (So whatever that was, it is on your 'forbidden to Christians' list.) Note that I am dealing with two sets of laws here...the law of God, and the law of man-made doctrines. In traditions of the "Early Church Fathers" you will find man made laws that are not found in scripture anywhere, but are held in equality with scripture to even being lifted up over and beyond scripture that when they conflict, then traditions of the church take precedence.

REMEMBER WHEN YOU WERE FIRST SAVED?

If you are reading this and you are a believer in Jesus Christ, this part is for you.

There is nothing that can compare with how we feel the first moments after accepting Jesus Christ as Lord of your life. It is a bright, shining moment when are sins are first forgiven and washed away. We have never felt cleaner in our own eyes than we do at the moment of salvation.

But as time goes on and we continue to run this race called life, we run into entanglements and temptations of this world. We try to recapture that incomparable moment....but as we fail, time and time again because we are mortals still in this body of flesh, we start to doubt our continued cleanliness or our being even saved. The more we are tempted, the harder we try. The harder we try, the more we are tempted.

EXPLANATION OF TEMPTATIONS

I read a story once of a luxury hotel built on a pier with ocean front balcony windows. On opening day, the manager, a fisherman, worried that people would be tempted to fish off the balconies. He feared the windows in the lower rooms might get broken when they cast their weighted lines into the wind. So he ordered signs posted in all the rooms strictly forbidding fishing from the balconies. People fished anyway. Windows got broken.

In a staff meeting called to discuss the problem, somebody suggested simply removing the signs. As soon as the signs were gone, so was the temptation to fish off balconies.

There is an old saying that "forbidden fruit is the sweetest" which means that laws made are meant to be broken, and a source of temptation fit this little story.

Another illustration that proves the point, is that people on a diet are always tempted to cheat. If you are allowed to eat anything you want then there is not temptation. What you are told something is forbidden, then you are tempted to do what is forbidden.

There is a old Abbot and Costello routine about chocolate cake diet. "A chocolate cake diet?" says straight man Bud Abbot. "You can't lose any weight on a chocolate cake diet!" "I know," Costello says, before delivering the punch line, "But I'm never tempted to cheat."

Same theory can be applied to those who are convinced they must keep the laws of their church, or traditions. Because like a fat man who wants that piece of chocolate cake, they are tempted from those that hold them in bondage to hold them to a work based salvation. And in both cases, they feel they must keep these man-made traditions to be saved, even if it goes against what their Bible plainly says is not true.

The Spirit of God expressly labels them both "seducing spirits" because both doctrines are so seductive, that they are both doctrines of demons, that seduce you into forging your own chains to replace the old ones that fell off when you first got saved.

The more things you have on your forbidden "Christian list" from whatever law you are trying desperately to keep, the more you feel unclean and dirty, because you can't keep either perfectly and the more temptations you have to fight off. Nobody can keep anything perfectly all the time. So that wonderful feeling you had grows more distant and seemingly unattainable. It doesn't matter if you are a "law keeper" that depends on keeping the Laws of God that cannot be followed perfectly, because if you sin in one point, you have sinned in all points of the law. So that it becomes impossible.

Men who hold to traditions, think if they do this ritual or say this chant, or follow the doctrines of their church perfectly, are saved. They take their eyes of the grace that was applied to their lives in a simple act of faith, and complicate it with the laws of men.

Some people feel that this constant struggle with either, wears down your spirit. You wonder if you were saved at all. Or worse, that you have lost your salvation.

43"When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none.

44 Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished.

45 Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation" (Matthew 12:43-45)

One law is unattainable as God knew that you could not keep them perfectly, is the reason God provided a substitute to free us from the bondage of being unable to keep His law.

The second laws of traditions does nothing to save the individual, but gives them a false sense of piety that causes them further bondage as being chained to their church, for without their church there is no salvation, at least in their minds. Both are a departure from grace. Sad fact that most who follow the traditions of men, know nothing about grace. They put their trust in man-made doctrines that their church will save them. They rely on their pastor or priest to guide them into truth, but never see the Light of Christ to shine on their hearts. So obviously, if you are reading this and think your church can save you, then without grace of God through Jesus Christ, you are entirely wrong.

THE SIMPLICITY OF GRACE

We began this message with a discussion of the simplicity of grace. We are saved by grace through faith that payment for our sins was made at the Cross and that the Blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin. Everything in the above statement that comes after the word 'grace' is the direct result of grace. The mechanism whereby we are saved is that our sins are covered by the Blood of Christ, shed as full payment for the sins of the world. The keeping of law or traditions can do nothing outside of grace. They will not provide salvation.

Dwell on that for a second. The sins of the world. The whole world. From the moment of creation to this present hour. You -- everything you are, all you know, all you've experienced, everything you've ever done or ever will do -- compared to every sinner and every sin ever committed in the history of man.

You know that the Blood of Christ was sufficient for them. *But you're different?* You try hard to keep the law found in your Bible...you try and follow the traditions set up by your church. You struggle, you go through the motions, and you feelempty!! Why do you feel such a way? Because you have not obtained wisdom and the ability to receive what is given as a free gift....grace!

Wisdom is thinking God's way, and God's way of thinking is expressed by His Word. Understanding comes from seeking wisdom in God's Word and seeing its application to a given situation.

Keep the laws of God through legalism is seduction against which the Spirit of God expressly warned. The law had a purpose. It was our school master to tell us that we could not keep it without sinning. It pointed us to Jesus Christ as the propitiation or substitute for us not being able to keep the law. We can come right up to that line, of law keeping, but once we cross it, we have sinned.

23 “But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed.

24 Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

25 But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.” (Galatians 3:23-25)

Conversely, keeping the laws of men's traditions that are in addition to what is written in God's Word, Paul expressly condemned such practices:

7 “Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ.

8 But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.

9 As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed” (Galatians 1:7-9)

The law pointed us to salvation that reveals our need to walk close to God, but it is not for the purpose of currying favor with God through good works, but rather for protection against the temptations of the law.

That's why we are not under the law, but under grace.

14 “For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.

15 What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid.” (Romans 6:14-15)

Conversely, we are not under the traditions of men, as should be obvious to anyone reading this...keeping traditions, or keeping the law in legalism does only one thing. Doing so pulls our attention and our dependency on Jesus Christ and His atonement. We can do nothing to secure our salvation...except through faith in Christ alone.

7 “That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.” (Ephesians 2:7-9)

Under grace, God accepts us based on the fact we are in Christ and judged according to Christ's performance on our behalf. Under the law, we are judged exclusively on our own performance. Traditions are in addition to law keeping, but the doctrines of men and they give false assurance of salvation through your church. Law keeping, observing traditions and grace are therefore each complete systems unto themselves. They are also mutually exclusive. To mix these principles robs the law of its terror, grace of its graciousness and traditions of mere men complicate both to making them of none affect.

Grace cannot be made complicated, despite our best efforts, because in the end, it only means one thing, and every expression of that meaning carries with it the very flavor of heaven. 'Grace' (Greek: *charis*) means 'gift' -- but it means so much more than that.

It also means acceptable, benefit, favor, joy, liberality, pleasure, thankworthy, -- the word 'grace' carries so much yet it weighs so little on the mind. Grace cannot be appropriated, it can only be offered freely, or it is no longer grace.

Conversely, traditions are man-made concepts that Jesus railed against which in today's world, I call them modern day Pharisees.

27 “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.

28 Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.” (Matthew 23:27-28)

And grace cannot be rescinded, or it was never grace to begin with.

6 "And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:

7 That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.” (Ephesians 2:6-9)

"For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." (Romans 8:15)side note, the word ABBA in Hebrew means DADDY.

Both legalism and traditions are men's express inability to come to God. God comes to us. We don't seek God, He seeks us.

11 “There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.

12 They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.

13 Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips:

14 Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness:

15 Their feet are swift to shed blood:

16 Destruction and misery are in their ways:

17 And the way of peace have they not known:

18 There is no fear of God before their eye” (Romans 3:11-18)

So you see, my friend, those who follow after the precepts of men, either through legalism, or traditions of their church follow after their denomination, not after God. God is so much more than these two doctrines of demons. He is about a love that passeth all understanding.

6 “For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.

7 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.

8 But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

9 Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him” (Romans 5:6-9)

Being justified by Christ, through His finished work on the cross, provided us with salvation through His grace...and MERCY....what is mercy..?

Mercy is not receiving something we deserve. That is what Christ did through His love, His Grace and His Mercy, gave us what we do not deserve.....Eternal Life. And took on what we did deserve....death. He was the Lamb of God that took away the sins of the world through His own death unto salvation for all who believe.

“And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:7)

Let me ask you a simple question. Do you see yourself here in this message? Are you trying to follow the precepts of men, through legalism and traditions?? Do you rely on your church, or do you rely on God? In plain English, these are two distinctly different subjects....one IS Salvation by Jesus Christ, the other is suppose to lead you to Him by using God's Word and letting the Holy Spirit draw you to Him. Where is your trust...who do you believe? Do you believe God or men?

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him, should not perish, but have everlasting life.

God sent not His Son to condemn the world, but that the world through Him, might be saved.” (John 3:16-17)

9 That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

10 For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

11 For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.” (Romans 10:9-11)

Don't let anyone fool you, or stand in the way of believing in the only way back to God. It is not through either of the doctrines of demons we have discussed, but through the shed blood of Jesus Christ, Him crucified and resurrected to the right hand of God Almighty. Grace is a gift of God, not of works, let any man should boast.

This is Pastor Mike Taylor, proclaiming the grace of God through Jesus Christ our Lord. If you need prayer, counseling, or just a listening ear, email me at realteam1999@sbcglobal.net, or visit me online at www.pastormiketaylor.blogspot.com. God bless you all

TILL WE MEET AT JESUS FEET